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# PROVERBS, ECCLESIASTES,

AND

# THE SONG OF SOLOMON,

## WITH NOTES,

*CRITICAL, EXPLANATORY, AND PRACTICAL,*

DESIGNED FOR BOTH PASTORS AND PEOPLE.

BY

~~REV.~~ HENRY COWLES, ~~D.D.~~

"Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I except some man should guide me?"—ACTS VIII, 30, 31.

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# PREFACE TO PROVERBS AND ECCLESIASTES.

PASSING from the Old Testament Prophets to Solomon, I am impressed here also with the conviction that the full sense of this inspired author is not ordinarily reached by the mass of readers; that Solomon has more beautiful and worthy thought than is commonly supposed, and also more profound wisdom and counsel toward a virtuous and happy life. Animated by the hope of rendering some aid to the student of these divine oracles, I have endeavored first to gain the precise significance of every verse, and then to present it in a form at once simple, lucid, and forcible. As the only method that could promise success, I have sought to find the author's precise meaning by studying the language in which he wrote—the very words which he has sent down to us; yet my criticisms upon the original have been introduced in these Notes only when it seemed to be demanded to justify the conclusions which I have reached. I send forth these Notes on the Proverbs of Solomon in the hope that they will be specially useful to the young—a hope which so manifestly filled the bosom of Solomon when he wrote them and addressed so many portions of them in the touching words, "My Son." O might his words go to the heart of all the sons and daughters of our land who are now shaping their habits for life, settling their principles, and thus casting the mold of their eventful future!

In my studies upon Ecclesiastes my main effort has been to



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evolve the animus and aim of the book from the known circumstances of the author, from his personal experiences and his manifold relationships to the great society of the civilized world. If I mistake not, this book, studied in the light of these facts of his history, will develop more self-consistent unity, and more fitness, beauty, and moral power than have been often recognized.

OBERLIN, Ohio, Feb. 1870.

# PROVERBS.

## INTRODUCTION.

The Author.—This book is attributed (chap. 1: 1) to Solomon, who was the son of David and his successor on the throne of Israel. The book itself makes the last two chapters an exception, ascribing chap. 30 to one Agur, and chap. 31 to a certain king Lemuel and his mother. The fact that while the book in general is ascribed to Solomon, these special exceptions and these only appear in the book itself, is presumptive evidence that all the rest is the work of Solomon, and was so regarded by the original compilers. A distinct notice of this work of compilation appears in the opening of chap. 25, which is justly supposed to include the five chapters immediately following (25–29) as having been collected and compiled ("copied out") by certain men assigned to this service by king Hezekiah.

The *history of Solomon* should be carefully studied, both for its bearing on the question of the authorship of this book, and for the light it will afford toward its interpretation. This history is recorded 1 Kings, chapters 1–11, and 1 Chron., chapters 22, 23, 28, 29, and 2 Chron., chapters 1–9. The salient points of this history are that, coming to the throne in his youth, he found the government well organized; the nation eminently prosperous; its territories extended far beyond the original limits of Palestine, even from the Euphrates on the east to the border of Egypt on the south-west; its ancient enemies subdued, and the nation enjoying uninterrupted peace. Consequently he had every facility for giving

his attention to the arts of peace. It seems that his own genius led him especially to the study of natural science and of ethical philosophy. His father, amid the scenes of a life full of adventure, peril, war, and political organization, had yet found both the heart and the time to write a most precious volume of lyric poetry—indeed, to open a new era of sacred music and song, and to organize and establish an entirely new department of religious worship in connection with the public service of the sanctuary. With this great example before him, Solomon gave himself to philosophical studies and developed a new department of sacred literature—that of *moral philosophy expressed in proverbs.* So far as appears in Hebrew history, this was untrodden ground—a field of literary labor no less original for him than that of lyric poetry and sacred song had been to his venerable father. The historian makes special note of his works in this department of literature. "He spake three thousand proverbs and his songs were one thousand and five" (1 Kings 4: 32).——Natural history also received his attention. "He spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts and of fowls, and of creeping things and of fishes" (v. 33). But especially does the history dwell upon his unparalleled wisdom. We are not left to infer that this wisdom was merely an original talent, developed by culture, but the historian attributes it especially to the gift of God. "God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is upon the sea-shore. And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country and all the wisdom of Egypt" (1 Kings 4: 29, 30).——Wisdom, as a special fitness for ruling well a great people, was the one gift chosen by Solomon before all other gifts—a choice eminently pleasing to God, so that he not only granted it, but superadded the other things which Solomon's choice had left out as of secondary value. ——Such was the man whose name stands at the head of this Book of Proverbs as its author. We have here not far from five hundred out of the "three thousand" given as the number of his proverbs. Why they are not all brought into this collection; why some that we have are repeated; why the same subject recurs not unfrequently in more or less modified form—these and similar questions may be subjects for speculation—they can be nothing more. ——Various critics, mostly German, have denied that Solomon could

be the author of portions of the first twenty-nine chapters. Making great account of what they call internal evidence, they assume to fix the date of various parts of the book at least two centuries later than Solomon. Their reasoning is of this sort. Finding an allusion (chap. 1: 10–19) to highway robbery, they say the government was well organized and the people were law-abiding during the reign of Solomon. Therefore no such life could have been led *then*, and no temptation to it, such as is assumed in these verses, could have existed then.——But it may be answered, When was there ever a period in Arabian history when such scenes were not frequent? And on what ground can it be assumed that Solomon could not know the ways of their life?, or that the temptations to such "spoil" did not come before the young men of Palestine with the growing intercourse between Israel and the outlying tribes, which intercourse was certainly one of the great national features of Solomon's reign?——Again, they say, Solomon doubtless wrote the portion, chapters 10–22: 16, for this is unique, consisting of detached, independent proverbs, the entire thought being embraced in one verse. Hence (they argue) this was his style of proverb, and *therefore he never wrote proverbs in any other style;* consequently the other styles of the proverb which appear in the first nine chapters and in chapters 23 and 24, were not written by Solomon.——But how, I ask, does this appear? Who knows that Solomon wrote no other sort of proverb but this? On what authority is this assertion made? Certainly it is by no means self-evident. Those critics claim no historic testimony in its support. So far as I know they make no pretensions to supernatural inspiration to this effect. It is, therefore, an assertion utterly without proof. What hinders that Solomon should have used all the different modes of constructing the proverb which appear in the first twenty-nine chapters?——Again it is said that the plural of "ish" (ishim) can not have been written before the times of Hezekiah; therefore the passages in which we find this plural could not have been written earlier than his reign.——But how do they know this? The utmost they can say is that (excepting the passages in dispute) they do not find this plural form in any extant Hebrew of an earlier date. But have they had access to all the Hebrew that was written prior to Hezekiah? And even if they had, have they also a perfect knowledge of the *spoken* Hebrew, so that they are authorized to affirm that this plural form was never

either spoken or written prior to the year B. C. 700? Every scholar knows that the extant Hebrew of a date earlier than Isaiah is very small in amount—entirely too small to form an adequate basis for such an affirmation. Such positive deductions drawn from so very limited *premises* are puerile and quite unworthy of sensible critics. Again, as one proof of a diversity of authors in this Book of Proverbs, it is asserted that the passage (24: 27–34) which commends diligence in husbandry was written by some farmer, and never by a king.——Indeed! as if Solomon, the wealth and glory of whose kingdom was its agriculture, had never noticed the look of the fields and vineyards of the slothful—had no sense of the value of industry and good management in agriculture, and therefore could never have written such a passage! He who spake of trees from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop; who was master of botany and apparently of all branches of natural history—had he never noticed the farms in the land of Israel? How very sage are such reasonings! How profound such conclusions!

At what period in the life of Solomon these proverbs were written, we have no data to show. If we may suppose that the somewhat frequent address, "My son" (*e. g.*, 1: 8, 10 and 2: 1 and 3: 1 and 23: 15, 19, 26, etc.) has some special reference to Rehoboam, we should locate those proverbs during the first half of his reign, corresponding to the youth of Rehoboam. It will be remembered that Solomon reigned forty years (1 K. 11: 42) and that Rehoboam was forty-one at his accession (1 Kings 14: 21 and 2 Chron. 12: 13). Hence he was a child of one year at Solomon's accession to the throne.

Of the *nature of the proverb* little need be said. The intelligent reader will readily catch their style. Plainly they are not tied down to any one specific form, but appear with considerable latitude of construction. In its most usual, perhaps normal, form the proverb is a brief, sententious maxim or saying, naturally conforming somewhat to the laws of Hebrew poetic parallelism, and therefore in two parts, one of which is usually antithetic to the other. Thus (10: 1) "A wise son makes a glad father; a foolish son, a heavy-hearted mother." The first half gives the wise son; the second, the foolish. The joy of the father in the former is set over against the grief of the mother in the latter. This antithetic position makes the thought more distinct. Contrast heightens its

force.——This antithesis is not always apparent without close and searching attention. It may lie between what is affirmed in one clause and what is merely implied in the other. Proverbs of this class are a sort of enigma or riddle, "a dark saying" (1: 6), designed to test the sagacity and tax the wits of the reader, and so heighten his interest and perhaps deepen the impression of the truth when he has searched it out—akin to that peculiar relish which boys find in nuts that are hard to crack. Thus in the proverb (10: 8), "The wise in heart will receive instruction, but a prating fool shall fall," there is a double antithesis: (1) The wise-hearted man (instead of prating perpetually himself) hears and receives advice; while the fool prates with deaf ears: and (2) The wise man (it is implied) lives and prospers by means of the wise counsels which he both hears and obeys; while the prating fool, neither hearing nor heeding counsel, falls into remediless ruin—this secondary antithesis lying between what is affirmed of the fool and what is left to be inferred of the wise. This proverb is a "dark saying" to the reader until he has studied out this implied idea and has thus reached the full sense. So in 10: 16, "The labor of the righteous tendeth to life; the fruit of the wicked to sin," you get the full antithesis and therefore the true sense, only when you have filled it out—"The fruit of the wicked to sin"—and *consequently to death.* The one, being righteous, works toward life and blessedness; the other, being wicked, toward sin and its inevitable result, death. This tacit assumption that sin weds itself to death and surely brings death in its train, illustrates the point of special beauty and force in this class of proverbs.——There is, however, a considerable range of diversity in the manner of making up these proverbs. Some of them are comparisons; "As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to them that send him" (10: 26). Or the comparison is blended with the antithetic arrangement; "As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more; but the righteous is an everlasting foundation;" where the passing away of the wicked is first compared to a whirlwind, and then put in contrast with the enduring life and blessedness of the righteous. ——The proverb proper is complete in a single verse. Of this sort are those which stand in chap. 10–22: 16. But in the first nine chapters, and also in the last seven, the same subject is usually continued through two or more successive verses.

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This Book of Proverbs differs widely in one respect from various collections of a somewhat similar nature which have appeared in other nations at diverse periods. The latter have first gained currency among the common people, approved and admired because in harmony with the popular feeling and touching the national heart. At length some mere compiler (not author) gathered them into a volume.——But this Book of Proverbs (with the limited exceptions above noted) appears to be the product, not of the popular taste and of various minds, but of one gifted mind—at once their originator and their writer. I base this judgment upon the manifest unity of thought, sentiment, and style, which obtains throughout: upon the obvious correspondence between the book, and the character and circumstances of Solomon, as given in Jewish history: and upon the apparent paucity of such proverbs in Hebrew speech, oral or written, anterior to Solomon. His extraordinary reputation for wisdom, and its strong endorsement by the sacred historian, indicate him to be, not the compiler of other men's proverbs, but the author and writer of his own. These remarks bear upon their origin, as seen on its human side, and by no means ignore but rather provide for their true inspiration.——It does not appear that Solomon compiled these proverbs in their present form throughout. When and by whom they were compiled, we know only in part. The three thousand proverbs which he spake (1 K. 4: 32) are not all here: indeed, only about one-sixth part are here; but who made the selection of those now standing in the first twenty-four chapters, we are not told. The compilers of chapters 25–29, we may presume, are indicated (25: 1) as "the men of Hezekiah"—*i. e.*, men designated by him for this service. Their names are not given. Whether Isaiah was active in this suggestion or in the labor itself, we are not told. We know that he was in active life during that reign; Micah also, and other worthy and capable men.——Of the authors of the last two chapters nothing is known certainly beyond their names.——Let it suffice us that the Lord commissioned inspired men to make up the canon of Jewish sacred books which was divinely commended to the conscientious reception, the reverent study, and the diligent observance, of his people in all ages. This responsibility was borne by a series of prophets, beginning, so far as we know, with Moses, and ending with Ezra and his associates, and perhaps his immediate successors.

*The references to this Book of Proverbs in the New Testament* deserve notice. They are somewhat numerous, but in general are not designated as quotations. The sacred writers use the book as it was made to be used—that is, for the value of its maxims of wisdom. For the best of reasons they did not look to it for prophecies to be quoted as fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. But they did find here maxims of wisdom for use in human life. In one passage (Heb. 12: 5) the words found (Prov. 3: 11, 12) are referred to as an "exhortation which speaketh to you as unto children," and which, therefore, must have been recognized as their accredited teacher; *i. e.*, as being words "spoken" in their sacred books. The writer to the Hebrews would say—"My afflicted brethren, how can you forget that those impressive words, 'Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord,' are addressed to children, to sons? 'My son, despise not,' etc. You recollect the passage in the Book of Proverbs."——The common form of reference to the proverb appears in Peter's words (1 Eps. 4: 8), "Above all things have fervent charity among yourselves; for charity shall cover the multitude of sins"—words taken from Prov. 10: 12, "Love covereth all sins." So also Prov. 25: 21, 22 appear in Rom. 12: 20, and the sentiment of Prov. 17: 13 about rewarding evil for good appears in similar words Rom. 12: 17 and 1 Thess. 5: 15.

This Book of Proverbs is pre-eminently rich in its lessons of practical wisdom. It teaches both the young and the old how to live in this world, resisting most effectually its temptations, shunning its snares, escaping its dangers, and insuring, in largest measure, the good it offers here and hereafter. The beauties of its imagery, the force of its words, the power of its solid and earnest thought, are things to be admired, and may fitly command our attention as we proceed; but these elements of beauty and fitness should never tempt us to neglect the moral application of these maxims of superlative wisdom. Let every reader see to it that the way of life and peace, delineated with such exquisite beauty and force, shall become truly the way of his own feet and the choice of his own heart. For what avails it to know the way of wisdom and life, and yet choose the way of folly and death?

# PROVERBS.

## CHAPTER I.

The author opens with an introduction to the entire book. He gives his aim and object (vs. 1–7), exhorts the young to regard the counsels of their parents (vs. 8, 9); admonishes his young friend especially against the temptations to robbery (vs. 10–19); and closes with the call of Wisdom (vs. 20–23), and the fearful retribution that must come upon those who will not heed her call (vs. 24–33).

1. The Proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel;
2. To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding;
3. To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity;
4. To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.
5. A wise *man* will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels;
6. To understand a proverb, and the interpretation: the words of the wise, and their dark sayings.

With obvious fitness the author begins with a clear statement of his objects, viz.: To help the reader to the knowledge of wisdom; to impart useful instruction; to give just ideas of moral rectitude; to settle grave questions of right and wrong.——In v. 4, "subtilty" must not be taken in its bad sense, of cunning, craftiness; but in the sense of sharp and clear discrimination and just apprehension; sagacity.——The "simple," here as usually in the writings of Solomon, are the open-hearted and unsuspecting who are accessible to every social influence, and therefore easily

seduced into evil ways.——He proceeds to say that every wise man will hear good counsel and will make acquisitions of solid wisdom and of all useful knowledge, so as to understand proverbs and those brief and condensed maxims which require skill for their interpretation. The "dark sayings" of the wise are those deep abstruse maxims which purposely task the ingenuity of the reader in order to fix their rich thought more deeply in his mind.

7. The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of knowledge: *but* fools despise wisdom and instruction.

This verse belongs properly to the introduction, giving very appropriately the state of mind in which wisdom should be sought. The "fear of the Lord" in the sense of Solomon is not a slavish dread, but a reverential and filial regard in which love blends with profound homage, and a respect which, as related to God, rises to the highest reverence. In this spirit we desire above all things else to learn and to do all our Heavenly Father's will. The lessons of heavenly wisdom are therefore cherished with warmest affection and sought with most earnest endeavor. So vital is this fear of the Lord to the acquisition of all true wisdom that it may fitly be said to be the very *beginning* of it, the starting point; the spirit without which there can be no truly honest and earnest pursuit of wisdom.——Fools may be known by their despising wisdom and instruction. In this their folly is always manifest. They have no heart for wisdom; they respect it not, and therefore give no heed to learn it, much less still to obey its rules of duty. ——Solomon would say, especially to his youthful readers: Will you go with me into this study of all wisdom? If so, then begin with implanting deep in your heart and cultivating carefully "the fear of the Lord." If not, then know ye your place and the company of your choice. None but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

8. My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother:

9. For they *shall be* an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.

The "law of the mother" includes her counsels and advice, as well as authority. Such obedience to the instructions of one's father is a graceful garland to the head; a necklace to the bosom. "Chains" about the neck are not thought of here as symbols of hard bondage, but of beautiful adornment. And truly; for what can be more lovely than filial respect to parents, manifesting itself, not only in sympathy with their feelings and kindly ministrations to their wants, but in prompt regard to their counsels and in obedience to their authority? The author appropriately places this exhortation at the head of this precious collection of the precepts of wisdom.

10. My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.
11. If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause:
12. Let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit:
13. We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil:
14. Cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse:
15. My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path:
16. For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood.
17. Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird.
18. And they lay wait for their *own* blood; they lurk privily for their *own* lives.
19. So *are* the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; *which* taketh away the life of the owners thereof.

Solomon admonishes the young to shun the temptations to robbery—the prevailing and besetting sin of freebooting life. The tempter approaches with the suggestion, Let us get up an expedition for murder and plunder; let us advance stealthily and fall suddenly upon some rich village or household; let us swallow them up as the grave does, in a moment, remorselessly; so shall we get stores of wealth without labor and fill our houses with plunder. Thus on the one side are the temptations of gain without work or cost; the social attractions of the secret fraternity and the love of bold adventure; the sense of power also, and the charm of witnessing the surprise and panic of the defenseless. but, on the other hand, Solomon admonishes his young friends that those feet run to evil and hasten to the shedding of blood (v. 16); that their movements may be anticipated and balked by the wariness of those whom they would fain surprise and destroy (v. 17); that their onset may recoil, and so their lying in wait will be for their own, not others', blood, and their "lurking privily" will cost, not others' life, but their own. He then draws the broad conclusion—So it befalls every man who is greedy of gain, for such greed costs the life of those who thus grasp at it.——This conclusion justifies the remark that this form of sin may represent numerous other forms, any and every other form indeed in which the social element is strong and human selfishness riots recklessly upon other men's interests and rights.——Such bold, extreme wickedness reacts with fearful power. They who thus take the sword will perish (usually) by the sword.——Some readers will ask—How came Solomon to put this form of sin in the foreground of his book? Could it have been prevalent in the land of Israel during his reign? Were not the restraints of law, civ-

ilization and religion so strong then and there as to preclude the temptation to such outrageous violence and wrong? I think so, *as to the land of Israel.* (See 1 Kings 4: 25, and 1 Chron. 22: 9.) But it should be borne in mind that the kingdom of Israel under Solomon was greatly extended. It reached even to the Euphrates, embosoming the great Arabian countries, as said by the historian: "Over all the kings on this side the river," *i. e.*, the Euphrates (1 Kings 4: 24). In those vast districts, bold, dashing robbery has been common in all ages. The extensive commerce of Solomon, coupled with the great enlargement of his dominions, sent many of the young men of Israel abroad, and hence would sometimes bring them under the temptation to these sins which were universal in all Arabian lands.——It may be suggested further that the great routes of trading caravans in the age of Solomon lay through the vast desert regions of Northern Arabia, past "Tadmor in the wilderness" to the Euphrates; and through Southern Arabia to the Eastern arm of the Red Sea at Elath. Along such routes of commerce, robber bands have in all ages been wont to strike.—— The reader will also recall various scenes in the early history of David fleeing before king Saul, and subsisting himself and his followers in a course of life which paid but doubtful regard to others' rights of property (1 Sam. 27). Solomon, in our passage, would inaugurate and sustain a better type of civilization.

20. Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets:

21. She crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, *saying,*

22. How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?

23. Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you.

By a bold but beautiful personification, Wisdom here becomes a person with a living voice, and this voice lifted up in all public places where men do congregate, expostulating with them for being so senseless as to love folly and delight in scorning, and hate knowledge. Appropriately she implores them to turn at her reproof.——If we bear in mind that the fear of the Lord (true piety) is the very essence and sum of wisdom, we shall readily see that this imploring voice is virtually the voice of God himself. Most certainly it is the God of retributive justice who speaks in the verses that follow (24–30) and who there says: "I have called;" "I have stretched out my hand;" "I will laugh at your calamity;" "Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer," etc. The voice of Wisdom, addressing men, is virtually the voice of God. It is God speaking in his kindness, his wisdom, and his

love, admonishing and warning the wayward to cease from folly and become truly wise. The words of v. 23 are specially pertinent considered as coming from the lips of our divine Lord: "Behold I will pour out my Spirit unto [upon] you; I will make known my words unto you." In the fullness of his love, he promises to give, not only good counsel, but (what is far more) the good influence of his own Spirit to impress his truth on human hearts and so change them from sin to holiness. This is one of the great central truths of the New Testament, yet far from being unknown to the Old.——Let us not fail to notice the force of the expostulation in v. 22: "How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity?" etc. Why will ye perversely take delight in folly and sin? Why will ye call evil good and good evil, and still labor to find solid good in what is only emptiness and vanity? Ah, why so madly bent on ruin?——The forewarnings of that ruin appropriately follow. The spirit of wisdom can not suppress and withhold such forewarnings.

24. Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded;

25. But ye have set at naught all my counsel, and would none of my reproof:

26. I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh;

27. When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you.

28. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me;

Here, in words of terrible truthfulness and figures of appalling force, we have the idea of *retribution*. Because the simple ones will love their simplicity (folly), and scorners will still delight in scorning and fools hate knowledge; because they will not turn to Wisdom at the voice of her reproof; because they will still spurn even the promised grace of God's Spirit; therefore, when the calls of love have been spurned full long; when Mercy, "knowing her appointed bound, has turned to judgment there," and so gives place to the sternness of just retribution; then the awful voice declares, as here—"Because I have called and ye have refused, therefore shall ye call, but I will not answer." The repetition and the accumulation of strong figures heightens the force of the passage. "I have stretched out my hands" in imploring earnestness, yet no man regarded. "Ye have set at naught my counsel" in utter disregard; "ye would none of my reproof," *i. e.* ye would not accept it, ye would not incline your will to heed it. And now, because of your stubborn attitude and unyielding repugnance, I, even I, "will laugh at your calamity." Ye have laughed in scorn at the call of Wisdom; ye have repelled even with derision the

imploring voice of God. Now, therefore, God will turn from you, and let the evils you fear come down on you as desolation and your destruction break upon you as a whirlwind, and there be no power to stay their stroke or soften its severity.——It is by a strong figure that Wisdom says: "I will laugh;" "I will mock;" the form of expression being due obviously to the force of the antithesis. Ye have laughed and mocked at my words; the time has come when I must laugh and mock at yours. The idea of retribution is thus put in its full force. Yet it must not be so construed as to conflict with the solemn oath of Jehovah: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezek. 33: 11). It has its parallel in Psalms 2: 4: "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision." Their utmost endeavors are infinitely puny; their most artful plots are ineffably weak, and seem only to provoke the contempt of the Almighty. The words before us seem to exhaust their meaning in the awfully solemn assurance that God will never swerve from his course of righteous retribution, but will make the reckless sinner's doom inexorable and eternal! Less than this they can not mean: more than this they need not imply. The idea that God takes a malign gratification in the woe of even the guiltiest rebel is forever precluded by the nature of his benevolence.—— Let those who give no thought to prayer now, remember that they will yet one day cry out for mercy; but it may be too late. "Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer. They shall seek me early," *i. e.*, earnestly, "but they shall not find me." It is unutterably perilous to turn a deaf ear to God's call, lest, in the retributions of justice, he be compelled to shut his ear to your cry in the day of your calamity.

29. For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD:

30. They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof.

31. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.

Retribution appears again, but more briefly. Sinners are spoken of, and not (as before) spoken to. Because ["for that"] they hated knowledge (the knowledge of God, true wisdom), and did not choose (but rejected) the fear of the Lord—true piety; they would not receive my counsel (literally, "they were *unwilling* as to my counsel," setting their will stubbornly against it); and they despised all my reproof; therefore they must take the legitimate consequences of their chosen course; they shall be sated to the full with their own counsel.——The word translated "devices" is one of a family of Hebrew words often met with in these chapters, and usually translated "counsel," in the sense of chosen plans of action See v. 30: "They would none of my counsel;"

and v. 25: "Ye have set at naught all my counsel." Because they had scorned God's counsel, he will let them have their fill, and more, of their own counsels.

Before we pass on from these words of God respecting the retribution that awaits sinners, let us note that the same doctrine of retribution is written both in the laws of man's physical constitution and in the laws which provide for and sustain society. These bodies of ours cry out in pain against abuse, and this pain is none other than God's voice of wisdom, saying: "Turn ye at my reproof." Drunkenness, gluttony, incontinence, excessive indulgence, give their signals of warning, and whoever persists in setting at naught such counsels, and in despising all such reproof, will ere long meet a retribution that knows no mercy. Many a young man, prematurely broken down and self-murdered, cries out in the wailings of his agony, but no ear is open to hear, no hand is stretched out to save. The heedless youth, who makes haste unto all sensual indulgence, soon finds that he has made haste toward a most relentless retribution. Wisdom called; he only scorned her call. But, when his fear came as desolation and his destruction as a whirlwind, his wailing cry for help brought no arrest of judgment, and could not stay his fearful speed to ruin. Ah, indeed, when Wisdom speaks, none can afford to miss her words, much less to scorn them!———In the same way society asserts her laws and enforces her retributions. The man who tramples on the property rights of his fellow men, by schemes of fraud or robbery, will surely find that to be known is to be hated. His crimes will rise up against him as if imbued with the very soul of retribution. So also men who outrage the rights of chastity and strike down all that is most dear in virtuous homes, will fire up the sternest indignation and jealousy which human hearts ever feel. Beyond a given line they shall find no mercy. Society can not bear such outrages upon her peace; she must visit on such offenders her inexorable retribution.

32. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.

33. But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil.

The simple here (as above, vs. 4, 22) are the easily tempted—the same class who are "fools" in the parallel clause of the verse. Their turning away from Wisdom's call is their ruin. As the word "slay" implies, it murders them; it is precisely suicidal.——The word "prosperity," used here of "fools," is rather their brutish apathy, their immovable quietude, an insensibility that no appeals of Wisdom, no monitions of peril and danger, can arouse. This works their destruction. But whoso hearkeneth to Wisdom shall dwell in safety and in quiet, fearless of evil. It is the very mission of Wisdom to forewarn him against evil and lead him in the ways of peace and safety. God is to him a kind and careful Father. Following his counsel must insure all prosperity and all blessedness.

## CHAPTER II.

The writer, commending true wisdom strongly and laboring to lead men to the knowledge and fear of God, promises these blessings to those who earnestly seek them (vs. 1–5), because the Lord gives wisdom to the upright and thus guards their way against all evil (vs. 6–9). When wisdom has really come into one's heart and is cherished and loved there, it will preserve him from perverseness (vs. 10–15), and from the adulterous woman whose ways lead to death (vs. 16–19), for the upright have long life in the promised land, but the wicked are soon rooted out of it (vs. 20–22).

1. My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee;
2. So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, *and* apply thine heart to understanding;
3. Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, *and* liftest up thy voice for understanding;
4. If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as *for* hid treasures;
5. Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.

The precious truths taught here are two-fold; (1.) Indirectly, that true wisdom is worthy of being sought with the utmost diligence; and (2.) Directly, that such seeking will insure success. The latter truth is fragrant with hope for all those who thirst for the knowledge of God and for real piety. It breathes the sweet assurance that those who seek with sincere and earnest heart shall find. Let them seek for such wisdom as men seek for silver; let them search as men are wont to do for hid treasures, and their labor can not be in vain. No other way of seeking for wisdom meets the conditions of success; this does. No seeking for other forms of good is sure of being successful, but such seeking for heavenly wisdom—the greatest and best good men ever can seek—never yet failed to bring the good sought, and never can. So seeking "thou shalt understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God." The Great Father never lets his lost children seek for him with earnest longing heart, in vain! Is not this a glorious truth, beyond measure refreshing?

6. For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth *cometh* knowledge and understanding.

The reason why the promise of wisdom to the earnest seeker is so sure appears here; viz.: because it is the Lord who gives it; it comes from his mouth; and he loves to give it. He desires

nothing so much as that his intelligent and moral creatures should ask and receive, and so become his trustful, dutiful and grateful children. Therefore if any man consciously lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all men liberally and upbraids not, and *it shall be given him.* Following the course of thought in our text, we shall see that this must be true of wisdom in the sense of this passage, viz.: true piety, "the fear of the Lord." Knowing God, as thought of here, is that practical and experimental knowledge by which a lost sinner returns penitently from his wanderings and waywardness; finds God ready to forgive and plenteous in mercy; and comes to know him as an object of love and trust.

7. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: *he is* a buckler to them that walk uprightly.

8. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of the saints.

9. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; *yea,* every good path.

He "layeth up," *i. e.*, in store, providing abundantly and guarding it well. But the word rendered "sound wisdom" seems rather to mean help, succor, salvation. This is the primary sense of the Hebrew word; the meaning of the Septuagint version; and withal, the thought in the parallel clause, "a buckler to them that walk uprightly."——In v. 8 the question must be met, Whose paths does God keep, and in what sense? Some have explained it of God's own righteous ways which he walks in, never swerving therefrom; while others take it to mean, the paths of just men, kept under the guardianship of God forever. The latter I adopt because in harmony with the course of thought in the parallel clause ("preserveth the ways of his saints") and in the previous verse also; and because it better accords with the meaning of the verb "keepeth."——These then are the elements in the blessedness of the righteous who seek and find wisdom in the sense of piety toward God and uprightness toward man. They are saved of God, shielded from the moral perils of this sinning world, for God is their buckler; He keeps their upright paths under His guardian care, and (v. 9) gives them understanding in all righteous and good ways. To walk uprightly is of course to walk securely.

10. When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul;

11. Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee:

12. To deliver thee from the way of the evil *man,* from the man that speaketh froward things;

13. Who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness;

14. Who rejoice to do evil, *and* delight in the frowardness of the wicked;

15. Whose ways *are* crooked, and *they* froward in their paths:

In particular, Solomon proceeds to show that wisdom, when really embraced in the heart and cherished so as to be sweet to the soul, will preserve its possessor from the influence of bad men. He describes these men. They leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness (*i. e.*, of sin); they love to do evil and their ways follow not the right line of honesty and integrity, but are tortuous, crooked, ruinous. The social influence of such men is full of peril to the young. From such peril there is no protection but in true piety. This brings men not only into a deep and honest love of uprightness, but under the protecting wing of the great God. He will stand for the defense and succor of those who humbly trust him, and will delight to shield them from the tempting power of bad men.

16. To deliver thee from the strange woman, *even* from the stranger *which* flattereth with her words;

17. Which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God.

18. For her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead.

19. None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life.

In yet a second specification, Solomon points out another danger from which true wisdom will preserve the young man, viz.: the adulterous woman. The words "strange" and "stranger" usually refer to one of foreign birth; but as this woman is thought of as "forgetting the covenant of her God," she is perhaps an Israelite, and called a "strange" woman because she has the spirit and lives the life so common among heathen women. She makes her words smooth, *i. e.*, seductive (v. 16); she "forsakes the guide of her youth" (her lawful husband); and "forgets the covenant of her God," the marriage covenant which is an institution of God, one which he will never see violated with impunity. This divine retribution upon her and her vile partners in crime is sure, *for* "her house sinks down to death" and her paths lead down to the under world where lie the shades of the dead. "Inclineth" falls far short of giving the full sense of the Hebrew; for the meaning is not merely that her house is an inclined plane verging down toward death and hell; but that both herself and her house sink down bodily, as it were, into the open jaws of hell. As in the case of Korah and his troop (Num. 16: 30–34), so underneath her house and all her adulterous household, the earth opens and swallows them up alive, and down they sink to the realms of the lost! Of all who go into her house for such guilty purposes, none

ever return again; the steps of no one ever again take hold of the paths of life!——Alas! what a record is this! O might this awful truth be made to blaze out in glaring light athwart the door-way of every such house of infamy and crime! No return from these foul precincts to the paths of purity and life! This house sinks down, carrying all its guilty ones to the realms of the dead—to the depths of hell!——Blessed be that wisdom which shields the young man from dangers scarcely ever less than death itself!

20. That thou mayest walk in the way of good *men*, and keep the paths of the righteous.

21. For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it.

22. But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it.

Preserved by wisdom from such fatal snares, thou mayest walk in the ways of good men, a life of honor, prosperity, and happiness. For the upright prolong their days in the land of God's gracious promise, while the wicked are soon cut off from the earth and rooted out of it by the swift judgments of the Almighty.——It was the more in point to speak of adulterers as soon perishing from the land of Canaan because by the Mosaic law their crime was punishable with death. (See Deut. 22: 22–24.) Civil law may be less stern in our times, but the laws of life, engrafted into every human body, bring down a swift and terrible retribution upon this form of sin. Of all sinners on the earth it is most true of these that they do not live out half their days.

## CHAPTER III.

The counsels and promises of good in this chapter are somewhat various, yet they all have one central thought, viz., to commend wisdom; to show its various applications and uses in common life and the blessings it surely brings to those who seek it diligently and follow its guidance carefully.

1. My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments;

2. For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee.

The speaker is Wisdom personified, and therefore speaking in the name of God. Or if we look at the human side of this com-

position and give prominence to Solomon as the author, we must still think of him as speaking for God, under his inspiration, and in his behalf. The law which he enjoins us not to forget is by no means the law of Solomon only, but is the law of Wisdom, *i. e.*, the law of God.——"Let thy heart keep," etc., is somewhat stronger than simply *remember;* it implies to remember with affection and with interest; to cherish with deep and pure love.——The reward of such obedience (as promised here) corresponds to the genius of that age and to the spirit of its promises—long life and abounding prosperity in this world, as in the fifth command, and prominently in the books of Moses (*e. g.*, Deut. 27–29). Such a system was a present and constant witness to the divine law of rewards and punishments which was to be first manifested signally in this world that men might have convincing proof of its reality in the world to come.

3. Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart:
4. So shalt thou find favor and good understanding in the sight of God and man.

Mercy in man is rather kindness; truth is truthfulness, veracity. The writer conceives of them as abstract things which may be repelled and driven away from the soul, or which may be cherished, bound as a graceful ornament about the neck, and written indelibly upon the heart. Retain them, he would say; make them absolutely thine own; engraft them into thy life, thy habits, thy very nature; for so doing, thou shalt find favor and prosperity with God and with men. Prosperity rather than "good understanding" seems to be the sense in the last clause of v. 4. It corresponds better with favor; is admissible as the sense of the Hebrew, and yields a more pertinent meaning.

5. Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.
6. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

Yet think it not enough to be correct in thy morals, or sagacious and far-seeing, in order to guide thine own ways in wisdom and success. Go rather to the fountain of all wisdom; go to the living counsellor; trust in the very Lord himself, yea, even with all thy heart: ask his counsel in all matters of duty and of interest, and trust in him implicitly for the help thou needest. Lean on him and not on thine own understanding. In all thy ways know him as thy God and thy guide, and adjust thyself carefully to all thy relations to God, thy great Father; then will he direct all thy steps. Human sagacity is short of vision, seeing but a little way: God's eye sees through to the end. O, is it not blessed that mortals may avail themselves of their great Father's all-seeing eye and guiding hand?——The sentiment of this passage appears also in Ps. 37: 3, 5.

7. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil.

8. It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones.

Conceit of one's own wisdom shuts out all trust in God's wisdom. Such self-flattery may be pleasing; it is none the less self-ruinous. It is plainly thought of here as opposed to the fear of the Lord and to departing from evil. Solomon would say, Do not be so self-conceited as to be reckless of God's counsels and defiant toward his warnings. Shun these fearful evils. So shall wisdom be health to thy muscles [better than "navel"], and marrow to thy bones. Physical health doubtless comes from obeying the physical laws under which God has framed the human body. Perhaps the writer meant to suggest tacitly that wisdom insures health of soul as well as health of body.

9. Honor the LORD with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase:

10. So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.

A new precept appears here, on the duty of recognizing God as the source of all earthly good, and of appropriating a liberal portion of our substance to his worship and cause. The Mosaic law required that every Hebrew should honor God with various sacrifices, tithes, and first fruits (Ex. 22: 29, 30, Deut. 26: 2 and Mal. 3: 10, etc.). Such dutiful and grateful recognition of His bounty ensured His blessing. The spirit of those laws remains in force, and must, so long as God is the great Giver of all earthly good, and we are only the receivers and almoners of his bounty. The covetousness of man's heart is naturally so strong that only the most stringent precepts and the most palpable present retribution of good or evil accordingly will avail to induce men to honor the Lord with their substance. How few will believe that it is really well to have God and his promises of good on their side amid the perpetual vicissitudes and reverses of all human things! All the varied circumstances of human life put men's faith in these promises to a practical and most searching test.

11. My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction:

12. For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son *in whom* he delighteth.

These words may perhaps be an after-thought to the verses immediately preceding, on this wise: Yet adversity will sometimes come. When it does, be careful to adjust yourself submissively to it. If the Lord should visit you with chastening and correction, do not take offence thereat: let it not provoke disgust and loathing (such is the sense of the original word); do not repel it

as an unwelcome intruder; do not wonder at it as a mysterious unmeaning providence—much less resent it as an outrage; but rather accept it as proof of a Father's love and thoughtful care. Do not human fathers try to correct the bad habits and improve the faults of character of their best beloved sons? Verily there can be no stronger proof of a father's love to his son, coupled with sound wisdom also, than judicious and kind efforts to correct his faults. So God's discipline of his children is one of his choicest blessings.——The writer to the Hebrews (12: 5, 6) assumes that the Hebrew converts, faint-hearted and depressed under their persecutions, must have forgotten this pertinent exhortation which spake to them as to children. For if they had kept this in mind, they would have said to themselves, These light afflictions are our Heavenly Father's rod of correction and come upon us as proofs of his special love and of his purpose to make us more fully "partakers of his holiness."——So David said and sung, "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law" (Ps. 94: 12). And even as far back as the age of Job, Eliphaz said, "Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth; therefore, despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty, for he maketh sore and bindeth up" (Job 5: 17, 18). See also Rev. 3: 19.

13. Happy *is* the man *that* findeth wisdom, and the man *that* getteth understanding:

14. For the merchandise of it *is* better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.

15. She *is* more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her.

Men of the world are wont to think those happy who amass gold and all precious things. Solomon pronounces those blessed who find wisdom because she is better than all riches.——"Merchandise" is not used here for the traffic itself, but rather for the gain acquired by traffic. He means that wisdom is worth more than silver, and therefore it is more blessed to gain wisdom than to gain silver.——"Rubies" represent all precious stones, such as have been in all ages the highest standard of value.——Finally, he closes this comparison of wisdom with all things most precious by saying, exhaustively: Of all the things which thou dost most desire, not one can be compared with wisdom. What more could he say to treasure-seeking men to extol its value?

16. Length of days *is* in her right hand; *and* in her left hand riches and honor.

17. Her ways *are* ways of pleasantness, and all her paths *are* peace.

18. She *is* a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy *is every one* that retaineth her.

Wisdom now stands before us in angelic female form, her hands loaded with the blessings she has to bestow. The picture is exquisitely beautiful. Long life in one hand; in the other riches and honor; her ways all pleasantness and her paths *peace*—this being the word under which the Orientals group all blessings.——Trees are symbols of perpetuity. A "tree of life" is therefore a perennial fountain of good, deemed worthy to represent even the joys of the heavenly paradise. This passage, descriptive of the blessedness of wisdom, has been greatly admired for its richness and beauty. But still we may say the picture is not overdrawn. The wisdom that begins in the fear and love of God, and then gratefully accepts the guiding hand of the All-wise Father, is a fountain of perpetual blessedness.

19. The LORD by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens.

20. By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew.

To heighten his commendation of wisdom, he adds that God himself has it and uses it, and especially that he brought it into use most signally in founding the earth, in establishing the heavens, in distributing the waters of our globe, and in making provision for the rich and precious dew. "How manifold are thy works, O Lord; *in wisdom* hast thou made them all!"——Following the conception in Gen. 1: 6-8, we must explain the breaking up of the great depths of water in accordance with the ancient notion, that, on the second of the six days of creation, God divided the waters of our globe into two great masses; the one reposing on the earth, and the other on a solid firmament over our heads—this latter mass being stored there to supply the clouds, the rains and the dews. Science has given us a different view of the firmament and of the laws by which the waters of our globe are kept in circulation; laws, however, which display to every eye the consummate wisdom of their Author.——Let it be our joy that the Father of all wisdom proposes to us: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him" (Jam. 1: 5).

21. My son, let not them depart from thine eyes; keep sound wisdom and discretion:

22. So shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck.

The renewed address, "my son," indicates a new point in the general subject, and one to which the writer would call special attention. (Sec 2: 1 and 3: 1, 11.) Remarkably he says, "Let not *them* depart," without having said any thing to suggest definitely what he meant by "*them*." Of course they are things of which his own mind was full, viz.: What he has said about wisdom. Hold those things ever in thine eye; do not lose sight of them for

an instant. As one who has a sacred charge to keep and must needs have it perpetually under his eye, so let thy heart keep wisdom and discretion.——"Life to thy soul" should be the *higher life* in which the soul lives before God; lives in the sense of true blessedness; lives to assert its just prerogatives as of a higher nature than the body, and therefore worthy to hold the appetites of the body in subordination to its own nobler impulses and powers.——It shall be "grace to thy neck" in the sense of an ornament of beauty, for what can be more beautiful than the life that is governed by true wisdom?

23. Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble.

24. When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet.

The two points made here are safety from external danger, and exemption from disquieting fear. Walking abroad unharmed represents the one; lying down at home in sweet sleep and repose betokens the other. The writer assumes that God takes care of his wisely obedient and trustful children, so that they neither come into collision with perils abroad nor suffer from the unrest of a troubled conscience in the silence of night, and in the home hours of repose.

25. Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked, when it cometh.

26. For the LORD shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken.

The same general thought is put here in the form of precept and promise. Let not thy mind be disturbed with sudden fear; be not afraid of the desolation that comes with crushing force upon the wicked. For the Lord God shall be thy confidence. Trusting in him no harm can befall thee nor plague come nigh thy dwelling.——This line of thought runs through Ps. 91, beginning—"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." It appears also in imagery surpassingly magnificent and sublime in the last words of Moses (Deut. 33: 26–29). "There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun who rideth upon the heavens in thy help and in his excellency on the sky. The eternal God is thy Refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms; and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee, and shall say, Destroy them," etc. It is refreshing to notice the fullness and richness of this sentiment as held by the patriarchs of old—*God, the Refuge of his trustful saints.*

27. Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do *it.*

28. Say not unto thy neighbor, Go, and come again, and to-morrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee.

Wisdom has its practical duties toward fellow-beings; here are some of them. The wise teacher, like Solomon, must not content himself with drawing beautiful pictures of a pious life. He must do something more than embellish his theme and charm our imagination with its splendors. It behooves him to come down to its practical applications and show us how true wisdom will make us live in the midst of a world of want and of suffering—a world in which every human being, however lowly or uncomely, is yet a man and a brother.——First in order he says: The good you have it in your power to bestow upon one in need thereof, you must not withhold. The fact that another needs it and that you can give it, makes it due from yourself to him. When your neighbor's pinching want drives him to your door, say not to him, "Go, and come again," as if your hard heart and close hand would fain stave off a painful call in hope it would never return. When thou hast it by thee, let thy heart give with the promptness of love. This is true wisdom. Man should live not to swell his own pile, but to bless his fellows; not to amass for himself, but to impart to others. God fills the world around us with want that we may never lack the opportunity of putting forth a kind hand to some needy one. The special point to be noticed here is the underlying assumption that help is *due* to the weak from the strong. This is the doctrine of practical wisdom. That life of wisdom which flows along with such inimitable peace and blessedness as we have seen in this chapter has a practical working side to it; and here are some of its manifestations.

29. Devise not evil against thy neighbor, seeing he dwelleth securely by thee.

Take no advantage of your unsuspecting neighbor to plot mischief against him. If he sleep with unbarred door through his confidence in honest neighbors, enter not that door as a thief and a robber. If he make contracts in all good faith, relying on your integrity and neglecting the safeguards of writing and of the technical forms of law, abuse not his confidence. You can not afford to make a penny at the cost of your own self-respect and at the cost of God's favor.——In some aspects of the case it seems marvelous that such maxims should be deemed necessary in this category of the precepts of wisdom. But Solomon had seen startling developments of human nature—men who would fain be thought wise and good, yet who would labor to gain the confidence of their neighbors only to abuse it, as this precept suggests. We may assume that he believed in the fact of human depravity.

30. Strive not with a man without cause, if he have done thee no harm.

Like the one preceding, this precept seems almost too obvious to require statement. The sin condemned is so palpable and so outrageous, why should any mortal ever need to be exhorted against

it? If he had said, Bear much and bear long rather than strive in self-defence or attempted redress, the precept would be more nearly what we should naturally expect. But selfishness and sin beget folly and a most unreasonable abuse of others. This striving with one who has done us no harm is a long way from the life of true wisdom.

31. Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways.

32. For the froward *is* abomination to the LORD: but his secret *is* with the righteous.

The oppressor is supposed to enrich himself by his oppression of his weaker neighbor. But even if he does, do not envy his ill-gotten gain nor choose his way of getting rich. God abhors him!——Perhaps these verses have a tacit connection with the two immediately preceding, showing that the temptation to devise evil against thy unsuspecting neighbor and the striving with one who has never harmed thee contemplate cases of oppression not unlike the American slavery *that was*. Let God be praised, if we may say—that *is*, no longer! Men are not wont to devise evil without an object, and that object will be some form of oppression.

God's secret is with the righteous—this word implying his intimate fellowship and friendship. It occurs Ps. 25: 14, "The *secret* of the Lord is with them that fear him;" also Ps. 55: 14, "We took sweet counsel together;" literally, We made our *association* together sweet.

33. The curse of the LORD *is* in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just.

Probably the thought here continues from the preceding verse, the connection being that God's curse follows unrighteous gain, comes into the oppressor's house and abides there, a scourge and a minister of vengeance, converting his fancied good into a living curse. On the other hand, the just man who wrongs not his neighbor, but befriends him in his need, may be sure of God's blessing on his habitation.

34. Surely he scorneth the scorners: but he giveth grace unto the lowly.

If men will scorn the Lord, spurning his precepts of wisdom, he will show that he can scorn them, sending his curse upon their house; discarding them from his fellowship and counting them an abomination. The grace of his favor he gives with full heart to the lowly.

35. The wise shall inherit glory: but shame shall be the promotion of fools.

To "inherit" carries the idea of permanence. Glory shall be the permanent reward of the wise, their life-long possession, per-

haps descending to their children after them.——In the last clause our received translation gives a good sense: Shame shall be the only distinction of fools; their shame and that only shall lift them up to public notice. Another sense somewhat different is possible: Every fool shall *bear away* shame, *i. e.*, as his portion; or in yet another construction: Shame shall sweep away fools, *i. e.*, into destruction. I prefer the construction first named, as giving the usual sense of the Hebrew verb, viz., to lift up, to raise high; and as affording a natural connection with the clause preceding. The wise have glory legitimately as their own due reward; but all the glory of fools is the prominence which their disgrace gives them. They become notorious for their infamy!

## CHAPTER IV.

In this chapter the writer pursues the same general course of thought, commending wisdom, and exhorting the young especially to study, attain, love, and obey it.

1. Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding.
2. For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law.

Instead of "my son," the usual form of address, we have here, "ye sons"—the same word, only in the plural form and without the term "my."——"Doctrine" stands here in the sense of instruction, something to be received and *taken hold of* by the ear and the mind. By all the love and regard ye bear to a father, listen to his counsels, for he loves you, and his experience will give you the ripened fruits of wisdom.

3. For I was my father's son, tender and only *beloved* in the sight of my mother.
4. He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live.
5. Get wisdom, get understanding: forget *it* not; neither decline from the words of my mouth.
6. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee.

I too (Solomon would say) was myself a son, cherished by a kind father, tenderly beloved of my mother, and I know, therefore, what it is to be the object of fond parental love. I remember the counsels of my aged father. I seem even now to hear him saying in my ear, Let thy heart retain my words; keep my command-

ments; so shalt thou live. Wisdom will reward thee for any and all of the regard thou mayest pay to her. If thou will not forsake her, she will surely preserve thee from harm. Give her thy heart's love, and she will keep thee with the best of all keeping.

7. Wisdom *is* the principal thing; *therefore* get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.

The original word for "principal thing" may bear the sense of *first thing*, or *the beginning*. Hence some critics construe this clause to mean, The first thing in wisdom is to get wisdom; the beginning of wisdom is to get it. But I can not regard this construction as in any respect better than that of our received version, viz., The best thing of all is wisdom; therefore get it; get it, though at the cost of all thine other acquisitions. It is the pearl of great price; sell all thou hast to buy it.——The last clause means, not *along with* all other gettings, but with the aid of them all, at the cost (if need be) of them all. You can not pay too much for it.

8. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honor, when thou dost embrace her.

9. She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee.

The thought in the first clause is put with equal beauty and strength. Exalt wisdom, and she will exalt thee; honor her and she will repay the favor in kind and exalt thee to honor.——That wisdom will adorn the wise is a favorite sentiment with Solomon, it having appeared already in 1: 9 and 3: 3, 4, 22. This fact ought to take strong hold of all the youthful lovers of beauty and splendor. Let them know that there is no adorning to compare with that of intrinsic virtue. "The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit is in the sight of God of great price." Beauty of soul surpasses all beauty of complexion and form, outlasting all charms of person and shining forth with only the more glory when the wrinkles of age creep over all that is merely "of the earth, earthy."

10. Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings; and the years of thy life shall be many.

11. I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths.

12. When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble.

13. Take fast hold of instruction; let *her* not go: keep her; for she *is* thy life.

That wisdom (implying true piety and a judicious observance of the laws of life) promotes health and length of days, is always true; was true in the age of Solomon, and never can be otherwise

than true. Yet it may be conceded that worldly prosperity, in the case both of nations and of individuals, was more uniformly the fruit of well-doing under that ancient economy than under our own. There were reasons then for a prompt and unvarying retribution for good or ill conduct which do not exist in this Christian age of the world. Whoever will read the book of Deuteronomy attentively will see both the fact and the reasons for it.——V. 12 speaks of steps as not *straitened*, a figure very common in the Hebrew writers and specially pertinent in an age when oftentimes men (*e. g.*, David before Saul) sought safety by flight, and of course needed a fair field and a wide range. But if they fell into a strait place, hedged in, with no outlet for escape, alas! their flight was arrested and escape became impossible. Wisdom saves men from these straitened places.——In running, men encounter a new danger, guarded against here by the promise, "Thou shalt not stumble."——The spirit of v. 13 is, Be careful not only to hold fast instruction in the sense of not forgetting it, but also in the sense of never failing to obey it. Be careful to *act* accordingly; so shall instruction be thy life.

14. Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil *men*.

15. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.

With all the earnestness of solemn repetition, the writer admonishes the young against going at all in the path of the wicked.——In v. 15 the words, "Pass not by it," do not forbid going past it, but rather forbid going *in* it, going at all that way. Avoid it (the path of the wicked); pass not along over it or even near it; turn from it, and so pass on.

16. For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause *some* to fall.

17. For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence.

Their hearts are fully set on mischief; they never think their day's work done unless they have ruined somebody. Their very bread is gotten by wickedness; their wine by violence. They live upon robbery and murder. Why, my son, shouldst thou have fellowship with such wickedness?

18. But the path of the just *is* as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

19. The way of the wicked *is* as darkness: they know not at what they stumble.

The wicked men who live by crime walk in a way of growing darkness in which they erelong stumble, perhaps never knowing upon what. They plunge headlong and are lost to the sight and

thought of the living, only that the good breathe more easily, conscious that a burden is lifted from the bosom of society. But the path of the just is like the growing light of morning, faint rays first streaming upon the eastern sky, brightening each moment, disclosing new beauties and new glories till at length the mighty sun himself is up and looks forth abroad over all the earth with his benign smile.——Some critics assume that this figure of increasing sunlight covers only the period from the first dawn of light to sunrise, while others extend it to noon when the perfect day is fully developed. The choice between these limitations to the figure does not essentially affect its pertinence and beauty, much less its significance. The change is more rapid and impressive if you close the scene at full sunrise. From that point onward to midday, the "shining more and more" is less obvious. Either way the figure is full of beauty, and the truth that shines forth in it is most precious. Legitimately the path of the just brightens as he progresses, ending often in a mild radiance of glory like a golden sunset. He is nearing heaven alike in the march of time and in the mellow ripeness of every Christian grace; why then should it surprise us that some beams from that world of light should heighten the glories of his "perfect day" before it closes?——The ungodly are not so. Ah! their ever-darkening path! Each joy dying out; every sorrow growing more bitter and more hopeless; sick of life and yet more dreading death; oppressed with the consciousness of having made life an utter failure; what can be so dismal as the sinner's latter end?

20. My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings.

21. Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart.

22. For they *are* life to those that find them, and health to all their flesh.

These sentiments have appeared substantially before. We may consider their repetition here as prompted by the life and death-scenes of the just man and of the wicked man, as portrayed in the verses next above. With those scenes vividly in mind, how solemnly emphatic must these admonitions become?

23. Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it *are* the issues of life.

Watch thy heart more than all other things that are to be kept, because out of it flow the streams of thy life. The terseness of the Hebrew tongue enabled them to say—"Watch thy heart above all keeping, for from it are the outflowings of life." The heart seems to be thought of as a fountain from which flow out all the streams of human joy or sorrow—the streams that make up the weal or woe of human life. Since man has the making and the guarding of his own life-fountain put under his own charge, it

behooves him to account it his first duty to keep it well. This life-fountain is the heart, the moral heart, out of which, says our divine Lord, "proceed those things that defile the man—evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, theft, false witness, blasphemies." Out of this come also the genial sympathies, the love and the friendship, the sweet charities that perpetually react to bless their authors and givers. But, above all, let it be considered that with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; from the heart men repent with repentance never to be repented of; the love of the heart is the fulfilling of God's great law and brings the soul into sympathy with heaven. Verily, there is infinite reason for keeping the heart with all diligence, since out of it flow such issues of life.

24. Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee.

25. Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eye-lids look straight before thee.

26. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established.

27. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil.

"Froward" (v. 24) translates a Hebrew word which means deceitful, false, a mouth that speaketh lies, one that *distorts* the truth. "Perverse lips" are the same. Solomon exhorts his young friends to speak the simple truth and never allow their lips to prevaricate, deceive, or in any wise to discolor the facts of the case. So the next verse beautifully conceives of the path of right and duty as straight, on a right line, and not tortuous and zigzag. Let thine eye look ever straight onward, with no thought of deviation from simple uprightness.——Ponder (in Heb. weigh), *i. e.*, carefully consider the path of thy feet that thy ways may be evermore on solid ground, firmly planted. Turn into no devious path, either to the right hand, or to the left. Reject all thought of guile, mischief, wrong, in any form. Are not these noble words of wisdom?

## CHAPTER V.

Solomon admonishes the young man against licentiousness and against all association with the lewd woman. The same general subject appears in chap. 2: 16–19 and 6: 24–35 and 7: 5–27.

1. My son attend unto my wisdom, *and* bow thine ear to my understanding:

2. That thou mayest regard discretion, and *that* thy lips may keep knowledge.

The fact that the temptations to lewdness are so powerful and so seductive in youth gives emphasis to the admonition. Attend, my son, to my paternal counsels, that thou mayest rule thy spirit and life wisely, and that thy words may be always words of knowledge.

3. For the lips of a strange woman drop *as* a honeycomb, and her mouth *is* smoother than oil:
4. But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword.

In the primary sense of the phrase, the "strange woman" is the foreigner, the woman from the outlying countries and of outlandish ways, *i. e.*, in those times, notorious for lewdness. (See the record respecting Moab and Midian, Num. 25.) The phrase probably came into current use to denote prostitutes of whatever nation, women lost to virtue and mighty to ensnare and ruin the simple. Of such a woman Solomon says: "Her lips distill honey;" her sweet words charm the unwary. Her mouth is smoother than oil, so artfully can she allure her victims.——Her "end" is obviously thought of as both her own and that of her paramours and victims. As the honey of her lips is not so much sweet to herself as sweet and seductive to others, so her bitter end involves not herself alone but preëminently those whom she seduces into crime and consequent ruin. The figures make strong contrasts; the sweetness of honey in the beginning but the bitterness of wormwood in the end. Her mouth is smoother than oil to entice to sin; but the sin committed becomes in the end sharp as a two-edged sword. Such are the contrasts between the beginnings of sin and the end thereof! It is preëminently true of this form of sin.

5. Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell.

Her "feet" and her "steps" denote not merely her own course of life, but that of her victims as well. She goes down to death and hell, but not alone; she drags her guilty associates with her, and together they sink into the grave and to perdition!——Her feet go down to death. (1.) Because the sin of adultery was by the law of Moses a capital crime, punishable by death. (Deut. 22: 21–25. See also Gen. 38: 24.) Illicit connection with "strange women" who were foreigners and of course idolaters would be a most aggravated crime. (See the record, Num. 25.) (2.) Because God has written his abhorrence of the sin of lewdness in the very laws of man's physical constitution. Human flesh is heir to no forms of disease more loathsome or more fatal than those which stand guard around this sin and visit their swift retribution on the guilty. (3.) Since repentance and reformation almost never

intervene to arrest the career either of the lewd woman or of her associates in crime, their course leads not only to the grave but to the doom of the lost beyond. While it can not be maintained that the Hebrew word Sheol, here translated "hell," denoted primarily the place of future punishment, yet there can be no reasonable doubt that God taught his ancient people to think of the sinner's death and the sinner's grave as opening the door-way and leading down to the woes of lost souls. "The wicked is driven away in his wickedness; but the righteous (he only) hath hope in his death" (Prov. 14: 32). "The wicked shall be turned into hell and all the nations that forget God" (Ps. 9: 17). The system of governing the world morally, which God pursued in those early ages of our race, in which he often, if not usually, began his fearful retributions upon the wicked here in time, and before the very eyes of men, could not fail to associate the first death with the second—the judgments which cut down the incorrigible sinner and drove him out of this world, with that final doom which was indeed only the same retribution resumed and made eternal. Let the reader consider attentively the contrasted destinies of the wicked and of the righteous as presented in Ps. 73: the wicked "cast down into destruction;" "brought into desolation as in a moment;" "utterly consumed with terrors;" but the righteous man peacefully singing: "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory;" "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." And let us suppose that we, too, like this psalmist, had gone into their ancient sanctuary and had heard there what we may read to-day of the doom of Korah and his company (Num. 16: 29–33); how Moses said, "If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men, then the Lord hath not sent me. But if the Lord do a new thing and the earth open her mouth and swallow them up and they go down alive into Sheol (the very word used by Solomon here), then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the Lord." Such a going down into Sheol has indeed the grave for the body in the foreground, but certainly this is not the whole of the sinner's death. It is only the vestibule of the real hell. So of the hell upon which the steps of the strange woman take hold, and to which she drags down her fellow sinners.

6. Lest thou shouldest ponder the path of life, her ways are movable, *that* thou canst not know *them*.

This verse involves real difficulty, and hence has been construed variously. A part of the difficulty lies in the fact that the grammatical forms of the verbs translated, "ponder" and "know," are ambiguous, inasmuch as they may be either the second person masculine or the third person feminine, *i. e.*, either, "lest thou, young man, shouldst ponder," or lest "she, the strange woman, should ponder;" and so of the verb "know."——The sense intended by the translators of our English version is by no means

very clear. What did they mean by "movable" as applied to her ways?——Prof. Stuart translates the verse: "That she may not ponder the path of life, her ways are become unsteady, while she regards it not;" in other words, "she is so busied and perplexed with her vacillating course that she fails to ponder the path of life." This seems to me to be weak in sentiment for such a connection. Dr. Muenscher gives it a better sense: "The way of life she doth not ponder, her paths are devious, while she regardeth it not;" *i. e.*, "she plunges reckless and headlong into a whirlpool of dissipation and crime, the inevitable result of which is destruction." Others variously. In my view the course of thought in the three preceding verses very strongly favors the reference of this verse to the strange woman rather than directly to the young man. The word rendered "movable" suggests the staggering drunkard. I would paraphrase the verse; The path of life she will not seriously think of; she reels, staggers, plunges downward to her doom ere she knows it. That is, she goes to hell in the most natural way. Repelling all thought of the way of life, and staggering on as one drunk with the poison of her own cup, she is gone before she knows it! How fitly, therefore, is it said that her steps take hold on hell! Who can loosen their fatal grasp upon that broad precipitous way and that terrible end thereof?

7. Hear me now therefore, O ye children, and depart not from the words of my mouth.

8. Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house:

The word "therefore" has force. Since the strange woman's doom is such as this—so sure, so near, so awful to herself and to her ensnared victims, I implore you all, ye children, to hear me and never turn away from the words of my mouth. Especially I entreat you to keep your life-path far away from hers and come not near the door of her house. Only in distance can ye find real safety. Take care that ye never come within the sweep of her temptations. How sensible!

9. Lest thou give thine honor unto others, and thy years unto the cruel:

10. Lest strangers be filled with thy wealth; and thy labors *be* in the house of a stranger;

Lest thou give (not precisely thine "honor" but) thy vigor, the stamina and strength of thy life-power (Stuart has it, "thy bloom") to others, and thy years to a cruel one—said with reference, some suppose, to the master to whom, as a slave, the convicted adulterer might be sold in punishment for his crime. But it may more naturally refer to the harlot herself and to her husband or other friends into whose power the lewd young man would fall. It were all in vain for him to look for mercy there! They might seize

upon his wealth, and the fruits of his toil would pass into the hands of strangers. His manly vigor lost; his years cut short; his money squandered and himself at the mercy of the merciless—what is he but the wreck of what might have been a man!

11. And thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed,

12. And say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof;

13. And have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me!

14. I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly.

O, there will be mourning in such a latter end of human life! So great a ruin for so small a consideration; the wealth of a noble existence thrown recklessly away! Think of the picture drawn here in colors so vivid; the miserable youth dying of effete old age long years before his time; looking in the agony of despair upon the flesh and the body which God made strong, but which his early vices have prematurely wasted; and then in the bitterest remorse cursing himself for having recklessly spurned instruction and despised reproof; tracing his inheritance of woe to its true cause in his own inexcusable folly, and giving free utterance to his self-reproach as if his last and only remaining duty to his race were to turn his miseries to some account for the warning of those who were now hearing such counsels as he had madly disregarded!——The last words of his confession go deep and give a yet darker shading to the life-scene. "I was in almost every kind of evil;" for lewdness breaks down the human conscience and drives its victims into almost all possible sins; and this too, not in secret only, but in public, despite of the virtuous sentiments of the good—"in the midst of the congregation and assembly."

15. Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well.

16. Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad, *and* rivers of waters in the streets.

17. Let them be only thine own, and not strangers' with thee.

18. Let thy fountains be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth.

19. *Let her be as* the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love.

In these verses the theme is one—to commend God's holy institution of marriage and to exhort the young man to be true to its

vows and satisfied with its enjoyments. The figures employed; "waters out of thine own cistern;" "running waters out of thine own well" (v. 15); "thy fountain" (v. 18); all find their corresponding literal expression and hence their explanation in the words, "Rejoice with the wife of thy youth." The only words of doubtful application are those of v. 16. And here the only real question is whether or not the writer takes the broadly comprehensive view of a well ordered family which accounts children as a heritage from the Lord and a numerous offspring as a blessing to the world. This is no doubt true, and a truth most heartily embraced by the virtuous sentiment of the age of Solomon. But the strain of the whole passage favors rather this sense: Let these joys with the wife of thy youth seem to thee evermore abundant and sufficient (v. 16); and let them be exclusively thine own and not another's with thee (v. 17). In this view, "fountains dispersed abroad" and "rivers in the streets" are merely images of abundance. According to the divine institution, live happily with one wife and let her love be to thee as an overflowing fountain. V. 19 presents the same sentiment under new figures.

20. And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger?

21. For the ways of man *are* before the eyes of the LORD, and he pondereth all his goings.

It is remarkable here that the expostulations against illicit connection with the lewd and base woman are enforced, not by any of the lesser and lower considerations, but promptly and squarely by that highest and most commanding of all—*the awful eye of God!* That eye which forever seeth in secret; that eye from which no darkness can hide; which no unchaste deed or even thought can escape—*is on thee*, and his pure mind pondereth all thy goings. Therefore, before thou shalt suffer thyself to cherish one impure thought, say promptly as the youthful Joseph said—"How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God!" (Gen. 39: 9.) Let this avail to shut off all temptation. How can I afford to incur the wrath of the great and holy God!

22. His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins.

By a figure common as well as forcible, sin is personified and armed with power to seize and punish the guilty. His own iniquity shall seize upon the wicked man himself and bind him with its own cords. The executioner of justice will never be far away, Ye need not hope to avoid his eye or elude his grasp, for where the sin is, there is the Nemesis, the avenger to punish sin and to make escape utterly impossible!

23. He shall die without instruction; and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray.

He dies, not because he has never heard, but because he will not receive instruction. The bitterness of his doom is in this: "How have I hated instruction and in my heart despised reproof!" It is in the greatness of his folly that he goes astray. This great folly discards all wise counsel, and so he rushes madly upon his own ruin!——And shall it be nothing to thee, O young man, that God has set before thee a pathway of life along which in purity and innocence, in conjugal fidelity and mutual affection, thy fountain may be always blessed and there shall be no bitterness in the end; while on the other hand, he paints to thee the strange woman as one whose feet go down to death and whose steps take hold on hell, and who bequeathes to her victims only the bitterest remorse and the most relentless and inexorable doom!

## CHAPTER VI.

This chapter comprises various topics: advice to those who may have made themselves responsible for others' debts (vs. 1–5); rebuke to the sluggard (v. 6–11); the ways of a wicked man and his doom (vs. 12–15); seven things which the Lord hates (vs. 16–19); and renewed exhortations to honor parental authority and counsel as a safeguard against adultery and the ruin it brings in its train (vs. 23–35).

1. My son, if thou be surety for thy friend, *if* thou hast stricken thy hand with a stranger,

2. Thou art snared with the words of thy mouth, thou art taken with the words of thy mouth.

To be surety for another is equivalent in modern phrase to becoming his security or to undersigning his note or bond. "Striking hands" together was one Hebrew method of publicly assuming this responsibility. The second verse is generally supposed to continue the description of the case, so that the word "if" should be carried forward, thus: "If thou hast been ensnared with the words of thy mouth, *i. e.*, if thou hast orally given thy consent to assume this responsibility for another's debts." The advice given in such a case follows:

3. Do this now, my son, and deliver thyself, when thou art come into the hand of thy friend; go, humble thyself, and make sure thy friend.

4. Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eyelids.

5. Deliver thyself as a roe from the hand *of the hunter*, and as a bird from the hand of the fowler.

"When thou art come into the hand of thy friend" means when thou hast thus placed thyself in his power, where, if he please, he can neglect to pay his debt himself and compel you to pay it.——To the Hebrew word rendered "humble thyself," some give the very strong sense, "prostrate thyself," give thyself up to be trodden upon" (Stuart); while others give it the preferable sense of making haste.——The last verb obviously does not mean "make sure thy friend," but rather be urgent with thy friend; *i. e.*, insist that he must pay the debt himself and release you. By the nature of the case, his making his friend sure is the very point of his own trouble; and now the problem is how to release himself honorably from this assumed obligation. Solomon presses his exhortation warmly; do it before you sleep; escape as a roe chased by the hunter fleeing for dear life.——Nothing can be more clear than the doctrine of Solomon in regard to the practice of becoming security for another's debts. It appears in 11: 15; "He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it; but he that hateth suretyships is sure;" also 17: 18, "A man void of understanding striketh hands and becometh surety in the presence of his friend;" again in 20: 16, and the same in 27: 13, "Take his garment that is surety for a stranger, and take a pledge of him for a strange woman;" see also 22: 26, 27. A different doctrine obtained among the Jews at a later period, *e. g.*, in the second and third centuries before Christ, as the reader may see in Ecclesiasticus [The Wisdom of the Son of Sirach] 8: 13 and 29: 14–16, 18, 19. ——The suretyship contemplated here should be broadly distinguished from either giving or lending to the poor for the supply of their immediate necessities. The latter duties are specially enjoined. The practice of suretyship came into the Hebrew community along with foreign commerce, such commerce creating the chief occasion for loans of money. The laws of Moses, and, indeed, the spirit of the Hebrew constitution, never favored foreign trade. In the latter periods of his life Solomon engaged extensively in such trade himself; but perhaps even then he would have dissuaded his subjects from it.

6. Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise:

7. Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler,

8. Provideth her meat in the summer, *and* gathereth her food in the harvest.

9. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?

10. *Yet* a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep:

11. So shall thy poverty come as one that traveleth, and thy want as an armed man.

The little ant is put before the sluggard as a model of industry, and most fitly. A very slight attention to his habits shows that

he is a wonderfully active and diligent worker.——Two points of his natural history are here assumed; viz.: that he has no recognized leader, and that he lays up food in summer for his use in winter. It is not important for us to discuss the correctness of these assumptions; suffice it that they were accepted as facts in the age of Solomon. The scriptures were not designed to teach us the natural history of animals; we therefore wisely look elsewhere for such knowledge. The moral lesson is equally good whether the ant gathers his food for daily use only and hibernates in winter, or gathers a surplus in summer upon which he subsists in winter.——It will be noticed that the lazy man is supposed to sleep far into the morning. To see the full force of this, we must think of the hot climate of Palestine and remember that if men did not work in the very early hours of the day, they did not work at all. To give these precious hours to sleep was to give one's self to utter idleness. Traveling could be done, and usually was, by night; but labor requiring daylight was best begun with the early dawn.——"So shall thy poverty come as one that traveleth:"——the force of this figure being heightened by the intensive significance of this form of the verb which means to ride swiftly; to move with the highest speed: and also by the parallelism, "an armed man," which suggests that the traveler here thought of is a mounted robber, an Arab highwayman on his swift steed, rushing upon you with the speed of the wind and with no forewarning. So shall poverty come upon the sleeping sluggard.

12. A naughty person, a wicked man, walketh with a froward mouth.

13. He winketh with his eyes, he speaketh with his feet, he teacheth with his fingers;

14. Frowardness *is* in his heart, he deviseth mischief continually; he soweth discord.

15. Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly; suddenly shall he be broken without remedy.

The type of wickedness depicted here is that of guile, treachery, and secret combination. This wicked man artfully plots mischief in concert with his fellows, concealing his designs from his intended victims.——The use of the feet as well as the fingers for secret communication, reminds us that the Orientals had either a slight covering for the feet, or none; usually sandals when traveling, nothing at home. Kitto remarks: "The Orientals are wonderfully proficient in making communications with each other by means of signs and gestures with the eyes, the hands, and the feet."——Upon such a wicked man, calamity shall come suddenly; it shall crush him without remedy. Retribution will have her course; society cannot endure such crime: God will not long delay his visitations of vengeance.

16. These six *things* doth the LORD hate; yea, seven *are* an abomination unto him:

17. A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood,

18. A heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief,

19. A false witness *that* speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.

This method of enumeration, by first naming a lower number and then adding one more, seems to have been in favor with the Hebrews. See four instances in Prov. 30: viz., vs. 15, 18, 21, 29; also Job 5: 19—Eccl. 11: 2, and Amos 1: 3, 6, 9, 11, 13 and 2: 1, 4, 6. Its use was obviously to aid the memory.——Excepting only the first, all the points here enumerated are direct violations of the law of love to our neighbor; and this first—the proud look—breathes the spirit of contempt for our neighbor's interest and welfare. The lying tongue which you can not trust, and if you do, it is at the cost of bitter disappointment, men will abhor, and God yet more.——A "false witness that speaketh lies" differs from the lying tongue only in the circumstances, *e. g.*, before courts of justice, in a case of special solemnity and importance.——"Imaginations", devised by a wicked heart, are not fancies, but plots for mischief.——It is well to consider that our great and good Father holds all his intelligent moral creatures to love and goodwill toward each other, simply because he loves all, rejoices in their welfare, and joyfully accepts the obligation of doing all he wisely can to secure the happiness of all. How then can he fail to abhor those who maliciously set themselves to frustrate the object so dear to his heart?

20. My son, keep thy father's commandments, and forsake not the law of thy mother:

21. Bind them continually upon thine heart, *and* tie them about thy neck.

Lewdness, in the special form of adultery, leads the course of thought throughout the remaining verses of this chapter and through chap. 7, also.——As your protection against this great sin, Solomon would say, keep thy father's commandments; forsake not the law of thy mother; bind them upon thine heart, tie them about thy neck; see that thou keep them ever before thine eye and close to thy heart.

22. When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and *when* thou awakest, it shall talk with thee.

These commandments and counsels will lead thy way safely, shield thee from danger by night, and commune with thee sweetly in thy waking hours. A lovely picture of the peace and joy of duly regarding wise parental counsels.

23. For the commandment *is* a lamp; and the law *is* light; and reproofs of instruction *are* the way of life;
24. To keep thee from the evil woman, from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman.

A lamp giving forth its light in the darkness of night and thus showing the way of safety, is a fine emblem of the judicious counsels of discreet parents and friends. Their instructive reproofs serve to shield the otherwise unsuspecting and unwary youth from the bad woman.

25. Lust not after her beauty in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eye-lids.

Do not allow thine heart to be fascinated with her beauty. The Orientals of that age painted their eye-lashes and eye-brows to heighten the beauty of the eye. The custom prevails in the East still.

26. For by means of a whorish woman *a man is brought* to a piece of bread: and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life.

Whoredom brings a man to the point of starvation, not only because it begets idleness and neglect of all legitimate business, but because it is a violation of law, and involves the guilty in its penalties. In all well ordered communities, society seeks to protect its dearest interests by stringent laws against lewdness, and especially against adultery. Solomon wrote with those laws and their penalties before his mind, as well as the natural consequences of this class of sins.

27. Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?
28. Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned?
29. So he that goeth in to his neighbor's wife; whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent.

By these forcible figures the writer would show his youthful reader that he might as well take fire into his bosom, or walk with bare feet on burning coals and yet think to escape harm, as yield to the temptations to adultery, and yet escape just retribution for such sin. Let him not think of adultery as anything but guilt, crime, an outrage on most sacred rights; an abomination both to man and to God.

30. *Men* do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry;
31. But *if* he shall be found, he shall restore seven-fold; he shall give all the substance of his house.

Comparing this sin with theft, Solomon says that men will so far abate their abhorrence of the thief, as not to despise him when he steals to appease the gnawings of hunger; yet if he is discovered and convicted, he must bear the sternest penalties of the law, restoring seven-fold, even if this should strip him of all his substance. But he implies that the adulterer will have no such abatement from the contempt and abhorrence of the community, nor will the law remit a particle of its most righteous penalties in his behalf. He neither deserves nor will he have the least sympathy; he will look in vain for any softening down in the severity of his condemnation, whether in the public sentiment of the community, the penalties of civil law, or the just retributions of the Almighty.

32. *But* whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he *that* doeth it destroyeth his own soul.

33. A wound and dishonor shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away.

No sin evinces greater folly and a more fatal lack of discretion; none other carries a more terrible ruin to one's own soul. His good name perishes; his reproach no tears can wipe away. Who can ever trust the adulterous young man to regard any rights or interests of his fellow beings of either sex? How can he be thought of otherwise than as a reckless enemy of his race?

34. For jealousy *is* the rage of a man: therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance.

35. He will not regard any ransom; neither will he rest content, though thou givest many gifts.

The injured husband is brought to view here. No rage burns more fiercely in human bosoms than this jealousy of the rights of the marriage covenant. How often in every age do we see this declaration verified; "He will not spare in the day of vengeance!" He spurns the poor ransom that money can make; you can not pacify him even with many gifts. He will forever feel that the outrage and wrong are such as no money can repair. Why then should the young be so reckless as to incur such rage and such fearful retribution!

## CHAPTER VII.

The subject with which chap. 6 closes is resumed and presented in somewhat new aspects; the writer exhorting the young man to keep his commandments and cherish wisdom (vs. 1–4), that so he may be preserved from the strange woman (v. 5). To put the virtuous upon their guard and to fill them with a just abhorrence

of the ways of crime, he sketches a life-scene in which are traced, first, the young man void of understanding, abroad in the dark night (vs. 8, 9); then a harlot and her vile seductions (vs. 10–20), and the sudden and fearful ruin in which she involves her victims (vs. 21–23); closing with renewed exhortations against being allured by one who has ruined her thousands and whose "house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death" (vs. 24–27).

1. My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee.

2. Keep my commandments, and live; and my law as the apple of thine eye.

3. Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart.

In the phrase (v. 2), "Keep my commandments and live," the word "live" is not a command but a promise; keep my commandments; so shalt thou live: it shall be thy life.——The "apple of the eye" is the pupil; in Heb. the little man of the eye, the part in which you may see your own image (diminutively) reflected. The sense: Keep my commandments with the utmost care as you guard your eye from harm. This exhortation is pressed and illustrated by every variety of figure—bind these commandments upon thy fingers to be ever before thine eye; write them upon tablets (not of silver or brass, but) of thy heart.

4. Say unto wisdom, Thou *art* my sister; and call understanding *thy* kinswoman:

5. That they may keep thee from the strange woman, from the stranger *which* flattereth with her words.

Bring wisdom into the most endearing relations to thyself; let her be to thee as a sister, a dear relative and bosom friend whose counsels thou wilt most tenderly cherish. The special reason for this as put here is, to keep thee from the allurements of the vile woman—one among the chief dangers incident to youth.

6. For at the window of my house I looked through my casement,

7. And beheld among the simple ones, I discerned among the youths, a young man void of understanding,

8. Passing through the street near her corner; and he went the way to her house,

9. In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night:

"Casement" should rather be lattice. The same word occurring (Judg. 5: 28) is there translated "lattice."——Solomon is careful to indicate that this young man was one of the "simple

ones," never forethoughtful of consequences and easily led into crime; one who, in the strong language of the writer, *lacked heart* (was "void of understanding"). He saw him take the way to her house; it was not in open day when good people transact their business, but in the late evening, in the very heart of the dark night.

10. And, behold, there met him a woman *with* the attire of a harlot, and subtile of heart.

11. (She *is* loud and stubborn; her feet abide not in her house:

12. Now *is she* without, now in the streets, and lieth in wait at every corner.)

In oriental life, both ancient and modern, harlots had an attire of their own. (See Gen. 38: 14, 15.)——"Subtile," not frank, truthful; but of concealed purpose, presenting a face fair but false. "Loud," *i. e.*, bold, void of modesty—one of her usual characteristics.——"She is stubborn," in the sense of having broken utterly away from the obligations of her marriage covenant and of being reckless of all right and duty. The original gives precisely the idea of *refractory*, law-breaking and self-willed. "Her feet abide not in her house;" her heart and life, her labors and her pleasures, are not there. Her character reminds us by contrast of those golden words by Paul: "Teach the young women to be sober; to love their husbands; to love their children; to be discreet, chaste, *keepers at home*" (Tit. 2: 4, 5).

13. So she caught him, and kissed him, *and* with an impudent face said unto him,

14. *I have* peace offerings with me; this day have I paid my vows.

"With an impudent face" is put forcibly in the Hebrew: "She made her face *strong;*" she assumed a brazen impudence, as a woman would need to do to perpetrate such falsehoods for so vile a purpose. Now she becomes very religious; she has made a sacred vow and has a thanksgiving festival on hand, and it therefore happens most opportunely that she has found her dear friend just at this auspicious moment to enjoy this feast with her.

15. Therefore came I forth to meet thee, diligently to seek thy face, and I have found thee.

16. I have decked my bed with coverings of tapestry, with carved *works*, with fine linen of Egypt.

17. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon.

For this very purpose, she says, I came out in the depth of this dark night to meet thee, to seek after thee very earnestly, and now I am most happy to find thee.——In v. 16, the word "carved" misleads the mind, the sense being only, "I have made

up my bed with coverlets, striped with various colors, of the fine linen of Egypt; all in the highest style of refinement." To this she adds that she has sprinkled her couch with the choicest perfumes known to the East.

18. Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning: let us solace ourselves with loves.

19. For the goodman *is* not at home, he is gone a long journey:

20. He hath taken a bag of money with him, *and* will come home at the day appointed.

The "goodman" is not merely the lord of the house, but the husband. The Hebrew has it precisely, "There is nothing of *the* man in his house;" but the article, "*the* man," points him out as the head of the house and the real husband of this vile adulteress.——He having taken a bag of money for a long journey, you need not fear his unexpected return. The word she used seems to mean, he will come home at the day of the full moon; entirely definite, and a long time hence, since this was in a dark and therefore moonless night, near the new moon.

21. With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him.

22. He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks;

23. Till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it *is* for his life.

With such allurements she drew him into her toils. Note the accumulation of figures. He went with her as an ox goeth to the slaughter, all unconscious of his doom; as a man foot-chained to the correction of his folly; as a bird hastening to the snare that is to seize and hold him. So he goes, till a death dart strikes to his liver. The general sense of the passage is clear, but the precise meaning of the clause rendered, "As a fool to the correction of the stocks," is somewhat doubtful. I have given the sense which seems on the whole best supported. The case is that of one already bound and being led to punishment; but it is to the correction or chastisement of a fool, *i. e.*, of one who is reckless, or of too little sense to be aware of what is before him.

24. Hearken unto me now therefore, O ye children, and attend to the words of my mouth.

25. Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths.

"Therefore," since such a doom fastens itself inevitably upon such a crime, I implore you to hearken to my counsels and never let thy heart lean toward her ways, or thy feet wander from the right course into her deadly paths.

26. For she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong *men* have been slain by her.
27. Her house *is* the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death.

In v. 26 the word rendered "strong" often means simply many—a sense to be preferred here because the parallelism sustains it. Literally, therefore, it is—She hath cast down many wounded; yea, countless are her slain. Not only her wounded but her slain are a vast number. Truly then her house is the way to hell, the broad way, thronged with reckless young men, void of understanding, and down it leads to the chambers of the dead. The word "chambers" looks toward the receptacles prepared in ancient tombs where the bodies of the dead were deposited. Alas! how swiftly the throng, traveling this pathway of crime, press along that broad way to hell!

The attentive reader of this book must be struck with the prominence given in these chapters (2 and 5–7) to this gigantic sin of adultery and whoredom. Yet none who know the depths of this iniquity throughout the world they live in will think that too much is said. Those may account themselves specially favored who have never had occasian to know the amount of licentious abomination that curses most of the great cities of this and of every land.

One of the most striking points in these sketches drawn by Solomon is that he assumes woman to be the chief seducer.——Shall this be attributed to a prejudice against the sex, or was it only according to the facts of the case in his age and within his knowledge?——With no attempt to exhaust this subject, I call attention to the following facts as going to show that these views of the female sex in that age were without doubt in harmony with the painful facts of the case.——(1.) Polygamy has always been and always must be debasing and demoralizing, especially to woman.——(2.) Idolatry was fearfully, terribly polluting. It would appal us if the facts were spread out to show the amount of female prostitution connected with heathen temples and idol worship. Let it also be considered that such a sanction of prostitution must have had a horrible influence upon the masses of the people.——(3.) The jealousy of husbands toward their wives which has prevailed for ages in Oriental society, the espionage and seclusion to which wives and daughters have been doomed, testify but too painfully to the fearful absence of virtuous public sentiment among the female sex in those countries.——(4.) The almost entire lack of female education and of all those influences and social usages which naturally elevate their sex, combine to account for the sad fact which Solomon assumes.

It is one of the brightest testimonies to the glorious work wrought by Christianity that it has so signally elevated woman. In every Christian land her sphere is indefinitely higher than it was in the age of Solomon or than it ever was in the ancient

East.——The assumption which appears here that woman is the chief seducer to lewdness—an assumption no doubt truthful then—is now to us simply shocking. The modern social state, leavened by Christianity, refuses to justify this assumption. The world has been lifted from that fearful depth of corruption which such debasement in the female sex indicates.——Yet let it be distinctly noted that the sin of seduction knows no distinction of sex—is no less cruelly wrong and no less abominable to God when man is the seducer than when woman is. Every word in this fearful portrayal of guilt and this appalling forecast of doom applies in all its force to the young man corrupting the virtue of the sisters and daughters of our land. The awful eye of God is on him no less surely than on the adulteress whose house sinks down to hell. Let him not think to escape his just retribution because in the constitution of his sex, he avoids some of the risks of natural exposure and consequent disgrace. The thing above all to be feared is the curse of a holy God which both searches out the guilty in this world, and follows him to the next, so that the real question for every young man to answer is—*How can I hope to elude the eye of the Omniscient God, or evade the visitations of his just and appalling retribution!*

## CHAPTER VIII.

This chapter is altogether unique, distinguished for its bold and peculiar personification of wisdom. At first, as in 1: 20–28, she is represented as lifting up her cry and making her most earnest appeal to the sons of men (vs. 1–5); commending her words as surpassingly excellent (vs. 6–14). She has been taken into service and held in honor by kings and princes (vs. 15, 16); is a treasure above gold and silver (vs. 17–21); and is then in a very peculiar strain commended to the regard of men, because present as a special friend and counsellor with the Infinite Creator and Lord of all in his glorious works of creation (vs. 27–31). Therefore Wisdom, so honored of God, ought to receive the most profound homage and regard from all his intelligent creatures to whom she brings a glorious wealth of blessings (vs. 32–36).

1. Doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice?

2. She standeth in the top of high places, by the way in the places of the paths.

3. She crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors:

4. Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice *is* to the sons of man.

5. O ye simple, understand wisdom: and, ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart.

Doth not Wisdom cry? Most certainly. Who can deny it? Who does not know it? She makes her perpetual call to the sons of men to listen to her voice and accept her counsels. In all places of public concourse, where men are wont to assemble and where she may hope to reach their ears, she lifts up her voice inviting their attention. With heart full of love and sympathy for men, with blessings most precious to bestow, she offers her counsels and longs to gain their ear and their heart that she may bless them. ——The reader will compare this chapter with Prov. 1: 20–28 on the point of bold personification in which Wisdom lifts up her voice to call wayward men back to God.

6. Hear; for I will speak of excellent things; and the opening of my lips *shall be* right things.

7. For my mouth shall speak truth; and wickedness *is* an abomination to my lips.

8. All the words of my mouth *are* in righteousness; *there is* nothing froward or perverse in them.

9. They *are* all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge.

The subjects of which she proposes to speak are of the highest order of value, the great principles of truth and righteousness, the gravest of all questions of moral duty toward God and toward man. She speaks only truth, never falsehood; and such truth as is always plain to men of upright and honest heart.

10. Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold.

11. For wisdom *is* better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it.

Here (as in 3: 14, 15) Wisdom is put above silver and gold and all things which men regard as having the highest intrinsic value. "Receive my instruction and not silver," was not designed to forbid men to receive silver, but to put in strong light the superior value of the instructions of Wisdom. Forego any amount of silver; spend it never so freely if need be; deem it comparatively of no account, that you may by all means gain Wisdom. Not with silver, gold, and rubies only is Wisdom compared and found far better, but with all things whatsoever that may ever be desired.

12. I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge of witty inventions.

The Hebrew word rendered "prudence" is sometimes used in the bad sense, subtlety; but here in the good sense, sagacity, sharp-sighted discrimination, and accurate judgment. Essentially

the same might be said of the Hebrew word rendered "invention," which sometimes means cunning and malicious plots; but here, only wise and well considered plans and measures for useful results. "Witty follows the old English sense of *wise*, and not the modern idea—sharp, sparkling with quick turns of thought. That wisdom "*dwells with Prudence*," implies the closest intimacy—living together on the best terms.——The whole verse seems to mean that, what prudential sagacity and large business ability are in worldly affairs, such is heavenly wisdom to man in all his moral relations and duties, guiding him surely and always to the best results.

13. The fear of the LORD *is* to hate evil: pride and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.

14. Counsel *is* mine, and sound wisdom: I *am* understanding; I have strength.

The "fear of the Lord," as used in such connections, is not a dread of his wrath, but a filial, affectionate, reverential regard for his will. Remarkably the writer seems here to affirm that this is equivalent to hating evil—essentially the same thing. Fearing the Lord *is* hating evil. Such fear is not merely a motive to the hating of evil; nor is it merely a tendency to such hating: perhaps Solomon meant to make a stronger statement than that it ensures such hatred, viz.: that it is essentially identical with it and really inseparable. For with such sentiments toward God men always conceive of him as infinitely pure, holy, and good, they revere and love him for these qualities; and what is this but to abhor all sin?——In the last clause, "do I hate,"—the personification of wisdom reappears in its full force.——In v. 14, "I have strength," is less exact than "Strength is mine;" the original being precisely the same as in the first clause;—"Counsel is mine."

15. By me kings reign, and princes decree justice.

16. By me princes rule, and nobles, *even* all the judges of the earth.

It should commend wisdom to the respect and regard of the young, that kings and princes bring it into use, and indeed, find their success and their true glory to be *as* the amount of sound wisdom which controls their life. Wisdom decrees justice; inspires all right governing; develops in man his highest dignity and worth of character, and the only true nobility of conduct.

17. I love them that love me: and those that seek me early shall find me.

Remarkably, Wisdom as here personified is thought of as actively benevolent, really loving and rejoicing in the happiness of intelligent, sentient beings. (See v. 31.) "I love them that love

me," not on the selfish principle of reciprocating favors for the sake of getting more, but I love to bless them, and when they give me their hearts, I can. Their love to me makes it possible for me to pour upon them my choicest blessings. Let all men know, and in their very heart believe that the infinitely benevolent God rejoices to lavish his most precious blessings into all such open and grateful bosoms.——In the last clause it is a question of some interest whether the Hebrew verb means early in life, *i. e.*, in youth; or earnestly, dilligently. The word occurs in four other passages in this book: viz., 13: 24: "He that loveth his son, chasteneth him *betimes*, *i. e.*, seasonably, early. Also, 1: 28: "They shall seek me early, but they shall not find me;" but in this case they had long refused to seek God, and, therefore, at last, God turns away his ear, and they seek him not early, but earnestly, yet in vain. Also 7: 15: "Therefore came I forth to meet thee, *diligently* to seek thy face," etc., and 11: 27: "He that *diligently* seeketh good, procureth favor." It appears, therefore, that usage somewhat favors the sense of diligently, earnestly, rather than early in life, yet it can not be deemed decisive. The consideration that Wisdom directs her appeal so generally to the young, favors the sense, early in life. A hearty earnestness is no doubt implied.

18. Riches and honor *are* with me; *yea*, durable riches and righteousness.

19. My fruit *is* better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and my revenue than choice silver.

"Riches and honor are with me;" *i. e.*, in my hand to bestow; in my gift. "Enduring riches," and not the perishable riches which this world affords.——In v. 19, the first word for "gold" conceives of it as dug from the earth, *i. e.*, the native ore; the second, as separated, *i. e.*, purified from its foreign ingredients. Wisdom is far before either.——"My revenue" is precisely my *income*; the profit I give.

20. I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment:

21. That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures.

As to the word "lead," (v. 20) usage favors the sense, *I walk habitually* in the way of righteousness. The consequence is, that I ensure the best prosperity and the largest treasures to those who ove me and follow my counsels. This corresponds to the genius of the Mosaic dispensation—earthly prosperity rewarding evermore the virtuous and diligent.

22. The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old.

The passage commencing here (vs. 22–31) carries the personification of wisdom to its highest point of boldness and sublimity. The conception throughout the chapter is graphic and grand, but

prominently so in these verses.——The early Christian commentators were charmed with the idea that Wisdom, as presented in this passage, is precisely the Logos of John in his Gospel (1: 1–5, 14), the divine "Word." They assumed that John found his conception of the Logos here, and that his description of the "Word" who "was in the beginning with God," was taken from this passage. This view of theirs fitly opens the main question of interpretation in this passage, viz., the choice between distinct personality and poetic personification. In other words, is this Wisdom a distinct person, an independent actor, intimately related to "the Lord," yet really acting a second part of his own; or is the language to be taken as strong personification, designed only to represent God as having and exercising his Wisdom in the original planning and producing of the material creation? My views in brief on this point will be given below, after the passage itself is fully before us.——In this verse opinions are divided as to the precise sense of the word rendered "possessed," most of the modern critics being in favor of the sense created, rather than possessed or acquired. I think that usage sustains the sense of possessed, yet I can not regard the point in dispute as one of special importance, since it is merely a matter of poetic conception. Only in this way can we speak of God, as either creating or in any way acquiring an attribute of his own infinite mind. Divested of its poetic drapery, the idea can be only this simple one, that God *exercises* wisdom in his entire plan of the material universe, so that in this sense his wisdom was present and active in his mind before the earth was, before the mountains were established upon their deep foundations, before there was any deep abyss to contain the waters of our globe. His wisdom planned all these wonderful and glorious parts of this great system.——"In the beginning of his *way*," refers to his ways of creative activity. Some give the original the sense, created me, the first and chief thing of his creation. But it is by no means clear that the writer intended to class wisdom among created things, as being one of them, and antecedent in the order of time to the earth, its mountains and waters.

23. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.

The original for "set up" means primarily *anointed*, but in the sense of inducted into office and commissioned to a responsible work. In this sense God determined that Wisdom should guide him in all his works, and thus installed Wisdom in the seat of counsel from the beginning, or ever the earth was.

24. When *there were* no depths, I was brought forth; when *there were* no fountains abounding with water.

25. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth:

26. While as yet he has not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world.

The leading thought is beautifully expanded. When there were no great ocean deeps I was brought forth into action to plan this wondrous system of waters, made up of mountains, hills, fountains, streams, seas, and oceans, all constructed to minister to the great ends of utility and beauty in our world.

27. When he prepared the heavens, I *was* there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth:

28. When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep:

29. When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth:

"When he founded ["prepared"] the heavens, I was there; when he described a circle upon the face of the deep," *i. e.*, according to the views of that and all the earlier ages, to draw the curved line where the firmanent above should rest upon the ocean waters below. "When he made firm the clouds above," constituting a firmanent strong and solid to retain and sustain the accumulated waters supposed to be stored above and to rest upon it. Job spake sublimely of the same creative work (37: 18): "Hast thou with him spread out the sky which is *strong*, and as a molten looking-glass?"——"When the fountains of the deep waxed strong," *i. e.*, in the fearful surging of their mighty waves during those stages of the creative work when the elements were in violent agitation.——"When he gave to the sea his decree," determining the shore limits which the mighty waters must not pass; "when he fixed" [rather than "appointed"] "the foundations of the earth," according to the ancient well known opinion that the earth rests immovably on some deep and strong foundations. In all these mighty works wisdom was present, guiding the creative power of the Almighty.

30. Then I was by him, *as* one brought up *with him:* and I was daily *his* delight, rejoicing always before him;

The Hebrew word translated, "one brought up with him," occurs but rarely, and hence its precise meaning is not absolutely settled by usage. Opinions vary, many giving it the sense of an architect; Stuart, a confidant; others a special friend, or a fondly cherished child. The sense of "confidant" harmonizes well with the scope of the context and with the frequent sense of the verb from which the noun comes. The idea is, that in all those stupendous works of creation, Wisdom was in constant exercise, consulted (to honor the personification) in every step of the process. And God delighted to use his Wisdom. He had glorious

purposes of benevolence, and in order to accomplish them, his Wisdom must needs be called into constant and perfect exercise.

31. Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights *were* with the sons of men.

Especially was this joy felt toward the intelligent beings of our world in whose happiness the Creator had the most profound and lively interest. It was in view of the earth as inhabited by a race made in God's own image, that Wisdom so rejoiced in those magnificent provisions for their abode, for their culture, discipline and development, and for their blessedness as the children of their great and good Father. A glorious view indeed of the thoughts and plans of God when he framed the earth we live in and fitted it up for the temporary home of his human family.——Resuming here the question of interpretation as presented above (v. 22) between distinct personality and poetic personification, I must say that the latter seems to me to be favored, not to say proved, by the perpetually recurring use of the word "wisdom" in the first nine chapters of this book as meaning intelligent good sense, a judicious choice of the best means to secure the most valuable ends. In its bearings upon our relations to God in the great questions of moral duty, the author labors assiduously to commend such wisdom to the high regard of his readers, expatiating upon its virtues, its moral beauty, its fruits of blessing. Rising to a strain of lofty poetic eloquence, he sets forth that "by such wisdom kings reign and princes decree justice" (8: 15, 16); and from this stepping-stone ascending yet higher, he witnesses to us that "the Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth" (3: 19, 20); and then to crown all, Wisdom becomes herself a presence and a power in the bosom of the Great Creator—*with him* during the ages before the matter of our world began to be; present through all the stages of that wonderful process of creation as an intimate friend and privy counsellor, rejoicing in the grand benevolent designs of the stupendous work, and blending her sympathies with those of the Great Builder of the worlds in the future blessedness of those "sons of men."——This seems to me to be a fair and legitimate construction of the passage, in harmony with the course of thought throughout chapters 1–9, and in no respect forced or far-fetched. The same can not be said of the other theory which takes Wisdom here as a distinct personality.——It may be added that this "Wisdom" is not said to be the *Creator* of all worlds, but to be simply *with* the Creator. It is not said here as in John 1: 3, "All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made."——Moreover, since every writer must aim to make his meaning intelligible, the sense which his first readers would naturally attach to his words should be preferred to any other. Applying this rule in the passage before us, we must prefer poetic personification before distinct personality as the sense most obvious to Solomon's first readers. How could they

have thought of the "Logos" of John as the sense of Wisdom in these words of Solomon?

This bold and beautiful personification of Wisdom as present and active in the creation of our world *is here for a purpose*, viz., to heighten the writer's recommendation of Wisdom to the regards of men. The Wisdom which I so earnestly recommend you to honor and to seek more than all things else is not only honored by kings and princes (vs. 15, 16,) but is and was the bosom friend and counsellor of the Great Creator of the universe. Of all the beautiful and sublime things which you admire in the heavens above or in the earth beneath, in the ocean depths, in fountains and rivers, in mountains and hills, none are so ancient as Wisdom; she was before them all and was present and held in honor by the great Builder and Framer of all when he "spake and it was done." Surely a personage so highly honored and employed of God in a work so magnificent and so fraught with utility and beauty, ought to need no higher recommendation to your supreme regard. Shall *God* honor Wisdom thus, and will *you* despise her? If God so exalts and loves Wisdom, let the sons of men, made in his own image, reverence her voice as it speaks in their inner soul. If God built the worlds for the happy abode of his intelligent and moral offspring, rejoicing in their prospective joy (vs. 30, 31), then let his sons and daughters fulfill the benevolent purpose of their great and good Father and give him the willing homage of their grateful and adoring hearts now and forever!

32. Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for blessed *are they that* keep my ways.

33. Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not.

The force of this logic ["therefore"] has been in part presented above. The consideration, "Blessed are they that keep my ways," may have special reference to the benevolence, wisdom, and consequent joy, with which God fitted up this globe for intelligent man (vs. 30, 31)—a reference of this sort: Since your great Father has felt so deep an interest in your welfare and has exercised his Wisdom so joyfully in these munificent provisions for your subsistence and for your highest and best culture, they must be most blessed who observe the ways of Wisdom. Falling in cheerfully with the wise and kind designs of their Creator, how can they fail of being most richly blessed?

34. Blessed *is* the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors.

35. For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favor of the LORD.

By yet a new figure Wisdom has her palace of abode, and those who seek her counsels are to watch at her gates and wait patiently at the posts of her doors. In queenly dignity she receives those who wait upon her, and blessed are they to whom her gates

are opened! To find her is to find life and to obtain the favor of the Most High.

36. But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death.

The choice of the verb for sinning suggests this shade of thought: He that *misses* my favor, making the fatal mistake of disowning and disregarding me, wrongs not only me, but, far more, himself. He perpetrates a fatal wrong against his own soul. All that hate me virtually love death! Of course, if they hate me, it is because they love sin, and loving sin is equivalent to loving death.——Alas, the mad infatuation and sheer folly of sin! Why will not men, gifted with noble intelligence by their own loving Father, be truly wise, and not throw their immortal well-being away for nothing!

## CHAPTER IX.

Under yet new imagery Wisdom invites the simple to her banquet (vs. 1–6); suggests the evil consequences of reproving scorners and the good results of giving counsel to the wise (vs. 7–9); defines and commends wisdom (vs. 10–12); and closes with yet another description of the foolish and unchaste woman (vs. 13–18).

1. Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars:
2. She hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table.
3. She hath sent forth her maidens; she crieth upon the highest places of the city,
4. Whoso *is* simple, let him turn in hither: *as for* him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him,
5. Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine *which* I have mingled.
6. Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding.

As in the previous chapter (v. 34) Wisdom appears in her palace, so here the thought is resumed and expanded. She hath built her house, prepared her table, and now sends forth her maidens to invite all the young and susceptible to her banquet. "Forsake the foolish," says she, "so shalt thou live"—a promise of life, and not a command to live.

7. He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame; and he that rebuketh a wicked *man getteth* himself a blot.

8. Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee.

9. Give *instruction* to a wise *man*, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just *man*, and he will increase in learning.

Some have supposed that these allusions to the hopelessness of reclaiming the scorner and to the reaction of shame upon those who attempt it are brought in here to justify Wisdom for not inviting that class of sinners to her banquet. Perhaps so. Whether so or not, these words suggest to good men the reception they are likely to meet with, and the wisdom of taking every precaution to guard against such results. Yet it is scarcely in keeping with the spirit of divine wisdom never to reprove a scorner. Sometimes they are not past recovery. Let us incur the danger of an unpleasant rebuff rather than forego all opportunity and abandon all endeavor to reclaim them. Rebuff may indeed be a failure, but can be no real disgrace. Let the good intention shield the faithful reprover from all reproach.——The wise man and the scorner are broadly distinguished by the contrast between them in their reception of reproof. There is no mark of true wisdom more decisive than a thankful spirit toward a kind and faithful reprover. Such a man shows that he is seriously aiming to become wiser and better. His virtue is no mere pretense.

10. The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy *is* understanding.

11. For by me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased.

Wisdom begins with the fear of God. This fear must always be its chief element.——The word "holy" in the clause, "The knowledge of the holy," refers to God in the special sense of knowing God as the Holy One and of having a just conception of his perfect purity of character. This is true understanding. Such a sense of a holy and just God imparts the best practical understanding of personal duty. Such practical wisdom (especially in those days) conduced to longevity. God's blessing was with it.

12. If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself; but *if* thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear *it*.

The contrast between the wise man and the scorner has appeared in the previous verses: it is put strongly here. The wise man reaps for himself the fruit of his wisdom. So the scorner is his own worst enemy and must bear in his own soul the bitter consequences of his folly. O *how* bitter in the wailings of his eternal woe when he will curse himself for his folly, for he might have been wise just as well!

13. A foolish woman *is* clamorous: *she is* simple, and knoweth nothing.

14. For she sitteth at the door of her house, on a seat in the high places of the city,

15. To call passengers who go right on their ways:

16. Whoso *is* simple, let him turn in hither: and *as for* him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him,

17. Stolen waters are sweet, and bread *eaten* in secret is pleasant.

18. But he knoweth not that the dead *are* there; *and that* her guests *are* in the depths of hell.

In several points this description of the foolish woman stands in contrast over against Wisdom as she appears in this chapter. She, too, has a house of her own, at the door of which she sits: her seat is "in the high places of the city" (precisely the same words which are said of Wisdom v. 3); like Wisdom, she, too, invites the simple to turn in hither, and he that wanteth understanding (compare v. 6); but her arguments are peculiarly her own. "Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant." Darkness and crime are her points of attraction. She is a bad woman; her appeals turn on the pleasures of sinning. Alas! she may succeed in alluring the reckless, unthinking youth, for he knoweth not that the dead are there and that her invited ones who have yielded to her allurements are in the depths of hell already! If he knew this, would he so madly follow her footsteps and rush upon the same destruction?

In view of the strong and manifold points of antithesis between this foolish woman on the one hand and Wisdom personified on the other, it is not surprising that some critics should assume that this woman represents, not the harlot in her proper person, but a false philosophy, or rather false systems of religion. This construction, however, is ruled out by the life-like and repeated sketches of the lewd woman which stand forth so prominently in chapters 2, 5, 6, and 7. Obviously we have the same character here as appears in those chapters, and we should do violence to those descriptions if we were to apply them to purely ideal error.

## CHAPTER X.

Here commences a distinct portion of the book of Proverbs. It is specially attributed to Solomon, and extends unchanged in general character to chapter 22: 16. Its special feature is that each proverb is complete in itself, having no intimate connection with what precedes or follows. Usually each proverb is made up of two propositions or affirmations, one over against the other, *i. e.*, in an-

tithetic relations. This antithesis is sometimes direct and sometimes indirect, the proper antithesis in the latter case being between what is affirmed in one proposition and what is implied in the other. Thus, in 10: 8: "The wise in heart will receive commandments; but the prating fool shall fall," there is no direct antithesis between the dutiful reception of commandments by the wise and the fall of the prating fool. But it is assumed that wisely receiving commands insures prosperity and life, and this prosperity lies over against the ruin on the other side. Such proverbs have this one feature of the riddle or enigma. They are to be solved by tracing out what is assumed or implied in one clause, and bringing it into its proper antithetic relation to what is affirmed in the other. Thus this class of proverbs was framed purposely to exercise the wits of the reader, the pleasure of finding the gist of the thought more than paying for the labor. The reader is referred to a more full discussion of the nature of the proverb in the general introduction.

1. The Proverbs of Solomon. A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son *is* the heaviness of his mother.

Wisdom and folly are here, not in the intellectual sense merely, but in a moral also (as throughout this book); wisdom, an upright state of heart and course of life, controlled by the fear of God; folly, a wicked heart and life that casts off all fear of God and all due regard for man. It is assumed that the former insures prosperity; the latter, ruin—for this world primarily, and, by inference, for the world to come.

The places assigned in this proverb to the father and the mother respectively were not named at random. It would not do nearly so well to say, "A wise son maketh a glad mother, but a foolish son is the heaviness of his father." It is much more according to the facts of human nature as Solomon has it. The father, full of the outward activities of life, enjoys the success of his wise son both because he is in the midst of those activities himself, because they constitute as to him life's burden and very much of life's thought, and because he therefore appreciates success in them at its full value; but the mother, quietly at home, has but too much leisure to mourn over the wreck of ruin made of himself by her wicked son. A father can almost forget that a son is lost to himself, to his family, and to the world; but no mother can forget her ruined boy! Her tender heart takes on the burden of grief and will not let it off!——Therefore, O thou wayward son, think of thy poor mother's heart! Whether thou canst or canst not forget that thy father has no joy in thy wisdom and in thy consequent success in life, O remember thy fond mother's incurable grief, and let the breaking of her heart by thy folly and crime haunt thee by day and by night and embitter every cup of sinful pleasure that Satan can ever press to thy lips.

2. Treasures of wickedness profit nothing: but righteousness delivereth from death.

"Treasures of wickedness" are treasures ill-gotten, *i. e.*, by oppression, fraud, theft, robbery. To say that such treasures profit nothing is the most effective thing that could be said, because men do not perpetrate such wickedness for its own sake, but for the sake of the gain it may bring. They say in their heart, "Though my conscience rebels and my heart recoils from this crime, yet the money I shall get from it is as good as any other money, and I *must have it.*" To which God replies, *No, indeed!* Money gotten by crime is good for nothing! It will bring only a curse!——On the other hand, a righteous course of life will bring you the utmost possible good; for what can be a greater good than to deliver from death, the worst of all human ills? The sense is not that righteousness saves a man from dying a natural death, but only that it saves him from the greatest and worst of other human ills which the word death is used here to represent. The antithesis lies therefore between ill-gotten gain, absolutely good for nothing—worse than no gain at all, and a life true and righteous in this and all other respects which insures the best of earthly blessings.——A similar sentiment appears in chap. 11: 6.

3. The LORD will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish: but he casteth away the substance of the wicked.

Most critics hold that the word rendered "substance" means *desire*, in antithesis with "soul" in the first clause, which refers to animal life. So far from leaving the righteous to perish from starvation, he will not let them suffer sorely from hunger; but over against this, he will repel the desire of the wicked as having no sympathy or care for them since they will be wicked.

4. He becometh poor that dealeth *with* a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich.

Poor is he that worketh with a slack hand—the indolent and remiss who leaves undone what he ought to do, and brings no energy to his business. Opposed to him is the diligent—the active and earnest man. The doctrine of the verse applies also equally to treasures of learning, and to the higher treasures of eternal life.

5. He that gathereth in summer *is* a wise son: *but* he that sleepeth in harvest *is* a son that causeth shame.

The thought is essentially the same in this verse as in the verse preceding. Be always diligent to improve golden opportunities, for to be reckless of them will bring upon you disappointment, poverty, disgrace.

6. Blessings *are* upon the head of the just: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked.

The last clause is difficult. The original Hebrew is somewhat

ambiguous, since it might grammatically be read, either "violence covereth the mouth;" or "the mouth covereth violence." The following constructions have been suggested by various critics, each of which has some points in its favor: (1.) Violence shutteth the mouth of the wicked, smiting them upon the mouth (see Acts 23: 2), or as we might say, "slapping them in the face," with both insult and wounding. In this sense the antithesis with the first clause is direct, thus: All men pour blessings upon the head of the righteous, but violence and abuse upon the wicked.——(2.) Transposing the subject and object of the verb respectively, thus: "The mouth of the wicked covers up," conceals words [plans] of purposed violence. His heart is full of them, though his lips may sometimes cover them for malign purposes. Yet he will be known, and then curses will come down upon him, even as blessings do upon the head of the righteous.——It is in favor of this construction, (a). That this antithesis is natural and forcible: (b). That the collocation of the Hebrew words favors the reading, "The mouth covers violence," and not "Violence covers the mouth;" (c). That this construction applies well to the same words as they occur below in verse 11. This construction is therefore to be preferred to any other.

7. The memory of the just *is* blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot.

"Memory" and "name" are here equivalent terms, both referring to posthumous fame—what is thought, said, and felt of men after they are dead. The righteous man leaves a name fragrant with sweet odors, hallowed memories; but the name of the wicked, foul and loathsome during its swift decay, the living are in haste to forget and to bury that it pollute the atmosphere no longer. It is in human nature to desire a good name among the living after we are dead. Hence the force of the appeal borne in this proverb: If you would leave your name fragrant with sweet odors and not a stench, be just and upright, and abjure the ways of the wicked.

8. The wise in heart will receive commandments: but a prating fool shall fall.

This proverb, filled out, would read: The wise in heart will receive commandments and *consequently will prosper and truly live;* but a prating fool, scorning wise counsel, will make a failure of life and will perish. The leading antithesis lies between what is implied in the first clause, viz., the wise man's success in life, and what is affirmed of the fool in the second—his utter fall. There is also a second antithesis, viz., between receiving wise counsel in the one sense, and babbling forth folly in the other. The latter, of course, never receives wisdom from others; he only prates out his own foolishness.

9. He that walketh uprightly walketh surely: but he that perverteth his ways shall be known.

Perverting one's ways is making them morally crooked, iniquitous. The man of such ways will be *known*, *i. e.*, exposed and therefore punished. The walking surely (safely) in the one case and the exposure and punishment in the other are the antithetic points in the proverb.

10. He that winketh with the eye causeth sorrow: but a prating fool shall fall.

"Winking with the eye" means artful, covert mischief. See its usage in chap. 6: 13. Such cunning, malicious plotting brings sorrow to others, while the babbling fool, always divulging his worst thoughts, brings not so much sorrow to others as ruin to himself. The former is the man to be feared and hated. The latter gets his own punishment without much help from the guardians of the public weal and the officers of justice.

11. The mouth of the righteous *man is* a well of life: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked.

Giving the same sense to the last clause here as to the same words in v. 6, we may put it thus: The mouth of the righteous man is a well of life: the wicked man is just as full of violence as the righteous man is of living waters, and his mouth covers these thoughts and schemes of violence only to make them the more destructive. Naturally the wicked man pours out mischief as the righteous man does blessings.

12. Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins.

The antithesis here lies between the enkindling on the one hand and the allaying and quenching of strife on the other. The spirit of hate stands over against the spirit of love, the former firing up strife; the latter extinguishing or preventing it, putting the best construction they will bear upon things doubtful, and suppressing from view where it can be done wisely. Peter seems to have had this proverb in mind when he said (1 Pet. 4: 8), "For charity (love) shall cover the multitude of sins."

13. In the lips of him that hath understanding wisdom is found: but a rod *is* for the back of him that is void of understanding.

Wisdom will appear in the words of the intelligent man, and this wisdom will bring him honor and well-being—his case in this respect standing over against that of the man "void of heart" [Heb.], for whom a rod on the back is the fit reward of his merit. Scourging with the rod was inflicted often under the civil law of the Hebrews as also in family government.——The phrase, "void of heart," describes one who seems to have no higher or nobler nature, but who acts under his animal impulses only.

14. Wise *men* lay up knowledge: but the mouth of the foolish *is* near destruction.

Wise men store up knowledge for constant use. Consequently this saves them from evils into which they would otherwise fall. In this respect their case stands in contrast with that of the fool whose unguarded reckless words expose him to imminent destruction. To say that his *mouth* is near destruction implies that this destruction comes from the rash use of his mouth in foolish speech. The original puts the case strongly by making the word "near" an adjective: "his mouth is destruction near at hand"—a form of destruction always impending and ready to break upon him.

15. The rich man's wealth *is* his strong city: the destruction of the poor *is* their poverty.

The scriptures do not encourage men to trust in riches rather than in God. See the words of Job (31: 24), and of the Psalmist (52: 7), and of Paul (1 Tim. 6: 17). Bearing this current doctrine of scripture in mind, we may say of this proverb that Solomon, here as elsewhere, aims not to put wealth in the place of God only as our trust, but to encourage industry, economy, and skillful management, by suggesting the value of the wealth gained by such means; and furthermore, that in speaking as here of the results of wealth and of poverty respectively, he may have thought rather of what *is* than of what *should be;* of what is as the world goes and not of what is intrinsically righteous. It is true that wealth oftentimes becomes a city of strength to shield the rich from evils under which the poor man sinks powerless. But these results of wealth compared with poverty are sometimes due to human depravity and would have no place in a sinless world.——Further, it is at least supposable that the original word for "destruction," which means precisely a *breaking down*, may refer to the *spirits* of the poor man, depressed, discouraged by his poverty.

16. The labor of the righteous *tendeth* to life: the fruit of the wicked to sin.

The antithesis of life is death—not precisely sin. But it is assumed that sin brings death, inevitably; and this assumption is the gist of the proverb. The word chosen for "sin" half expresses this idea of itself, having the sense of *missing the mark*, making a failure—a fatal failure indeed! If what the wicked man gains by his labor works toward failure and ruin, how wretched his case! To toil his life long and get only death eternal as the result thereof!

17. He *is in* the way of life that keepeth instruction: but he that refuseth reproof erreth.

Inasmuch as the usual sense of the last verb in this form of it, translated "erreth," is *to cause to err, i. e.*, to lead others astray,

the entire proverb may be construed accordingly—thus: He who keepeth instruction (in the sense of obeying it) leads in the way to life; but he that refuseth reproof seduceth others into sin and ruin. Yet the sense of the English version is by no means bad, the last verb having this turn—makes himself wander; takes the responsibility of ruining his own soul.

18. He that hideth hatred *with* lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, *is* a fool.

The general method of constructing proverbs is preserved by making two independent but related propositions, thus: He that hideth his hatred has lying lips—is a man of lying lips: and over against this, He that divulgeth himself in slander is a fool. Both have hate in their souls: the one conceals it with lying lips; the other pours it forth in slander and is a fool. Therefore let there be no hatred in thy soul, since either to conceal it by lying or to divulge it by foolish slander, is odious crime.

19. In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips *is* wise.

Whoever talks excessively with no good end in view will say some foolish, sinful things. It is wise, therefore, to put restraint upon the lips and consider ere you speak. The folly of this form of sin stands over against the wisdom of silence.

20. The tongue of the just *is as* choice silver: the heart of the wicked *is* little worth.

The *tongue* of the wicked is the proper antithesis to the tongue of the righteous. Hence the proverb implies that the wicked man's tongue is *as* his heart—bad, and of the least possible value. "Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh."——The comparison of the tongue of the just to choice silver is expressive, showing that its words are precious, fraught with the best influences.

21. The lips of the righteous feed many: but fools die for want of wisdom.

The point of this proverb seems to be that while the righteous have wisdom enough for their own salvation and to impart abundantly for the spiritual life of many, fools have not enough to save even their own souls from spiritual starvation. It may also be tacitly implied that such fools perish when they might have bread enough and to spare, there being righteous men at hand to feed them with the bread of life if they would take it.

22. The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich and he addeth no sorrow with it.

All other forms of good are in their nature imperfect, and come

to us mixed with some sad alloy of evil. Especially is this true of other riches than that which the Lord gives. But this is altogether pure—an unmixed good, and no sorrow with it.——Some, less well, read the last clause, And toil will add nothing to it.

23. *It is* as sport to a fool to do mischief: but a man of understanding hath wisdom.

Whoever can find sport in doing mischief shows himself a fool in the strong two-fold sense of being malicious and also unwise; malicious, else he could not enjoy doing mischief to others; unwise, for such malign mischief is sure to recoil upon his own head. On the other hand the man of understanding has too much good sense as well as too good a heart to do such things, and is infinitely far from being mean and vile enough to enjoy them.

24. The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him: but the desire of the righteous shall be granted.

The thing the wicked fear will surely befall him: the thing the righteous desire, God will grant. The agency of God is involved in the last verb which is not in the passive form ["shall be granted"] but in the active; he [*i. e.*, God] will grant. The worst fears of the wicked will be realized: the highest desires and anticipations of the righteous, God will fulfill. What a contrast!

25. As the whirlwind passeth, so *is* the wicked no *more:* but the righteous *is* an everlasting foundation.

Some critics read this, "*When* the whirlwind (*i. e.*, of God's judgments) sweeps over the wicked, then they are not; they perish." But the better construction comprehends both the time and the manner; as a rushing whirlwind will tear along in suddenness and awful terror, so are the wicked swept away and are no more! But no whirlwind can disturb the everlasting foundation of the righteous.

26. As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes, so *is* the sluggard to them that send him.

The point common to all these cases is discomfort, annoyance, vexation. The sluggard is a simple nuisance to those who employ and trust him.

27. The fear of the LORD prolongeth days: but the years of the wicked shall be shortened.

True piety prolongs human life in many ways; and sin cuts it short. See notes on chap. 3: 2, 16.

28. The hope of the righteous *shall be* gladness: but the expectation of the wicked shall perish.

The hopes of the righteous are a fountain of joy, comforting and

even exhilarating, and withal sure. But the expectation of the wicked shall be frustrated; every ray of their hope must go out in darkness.

29. The way of the LORD is strength to the upright: but destruction *shall be* to the workers of iniquity.

This "way of the Lord" is not the way of our duty which he enjoins, but is the way of his own working in his providential agencies. This way of his good providence toward the righteous is to them a tower of strength, forevermore securing their safety and blessedness. The same providence of God brings destruction upon sinners.

30. The righteous shall never be removed: but the wicked shall not inhabit the earth.

The righteous repose on a sure, stable foundation: the wicked shall not long inhabit the land, *i. e.*, Palestine, the Lord's land. So the word rendered "earth" should probably be taken, as in the Gospel beatitude, "The meek shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5 : 5). Two reasons may be assigned for this stereotyped promise; first, that it came into use during those centuries when Canaan was not yet in possession but was only a land of promise, the object of intense desire to the wandering people: and, secondly, that the Hebrews held the land from God, only on condition of obedience, so that wicked men forfeited all possession there, and were in fact often cut off by judgments or driven out.

31. The mouth of the just bringeth forth wisdom: but the froward tongue shall be cut out.

The beauty and force of this proverb are heightened by the figure underlying it in the choice of its words. The mouth of the just bears [produces] wisdom as a tree bears fruit; but the perverse tongue shall be cut off like dead, worthless branches.

32. The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable: but the mouth of the wicked *speaketh* frowardness.

The righteous know how to speak acceptably, in a way to please and profit, because seasoned with good sense. The wicked speak froward things, never pleasing to God; never fit to be acceptable to men. It seems to be assumed that they know not how to speak otherwise than perversely.

## CHAPTER XI.

1. A false balance *is* abomination to the LORD: but a just weight *is* his delight.

Scales and small stones for weights were used to determine the exact quantity of various articles bought and sold in trade. This proverb teaches not only that the eye of God is upon all such transactions, but that his *heart* is in them as well, and especially that he disapproves and even abhors fraud in trade; while his sympathies are with the injured party. He feels as those men do who are cheated and wronged by fraud. He loves the honest dealer.——The principle applies to fraud in *quality* as well as to fraud in *quantity*. In modern manufacture and trade, what an amount of adulteration God must see to abhor!

2. *When* pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly *is* wisdom.

Literally and forcibly the Hebrew reads, Pride comes, and then comes disgrace; but with the modest and lowly (as opposed to the proud) is wisdom. There is no wisdom in pride. It never gains the ends of honor which men seek to gain by it.

3. The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them.

His own integrity will guide the upright in safety and to happiness; but the perverseness of the *treacherous* [the precise sense of the original] will destroy them.

4. Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death.

Their wealth may screen the rich from the penalties of human law, as administered by corrupt or imperfect men; but what can it avail in the day of the wrath of God? As said by Ezekiel (7: 19), "Their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the Lord." In that day it is only righteousness that can save from death.

5. The righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way: but the wicked shall fall by his own wickedness.

The righteousness of the perfect (the truly honest-hearted) will make his path straight, smooth, and therefore safe, this implied safety lying over against the ruin into which the wicked fall.

6. The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them: but transgressors shall be taken in *their own* naughtiness.

The word translated "naughtiness" is the same which I have explained to mean desire in chap. 10: 3. I take the sense here to be that the treacherous (unreliable, unprincipled men) will be ensnared to their ruin by their strong evil passions. This stands opposed to the deliverance which the upright attain by virtue of their uprightness.

7. When a wicked man dieth, *his* expectation shall perish: and the hope of unjust *men* perisheth.

This verse has been explained variously. One objection to the English version is that the last clause makes no advance upon the first: it not only presents no antithesis, but adds nothing in any way. To improve this clause, I prefer the suggestion of Maurer which is that the word rendered "unjust" means *riches* (as it manifestly may), thus; "In the death of a wicked man his hopes will perish; yea, all hope from riches has perished" [already], *i. e.*, even before he is really dead. The verb of the first clause is in the future tense; that of the last clause, in the past. Also the former clause tells us *whose* hopes will perish; the latter, *what* hopes, viz., his hopes from his riches:——It should be noticed that the passage assumes an existence after death. This becomes the more certain when considered in connection with chap. 14: 32; "The righteous hath hope in his death." But that future life is to all the wicked hopeless of good.——It is not in man to limit his expectations and hopes by the bounding line of death. He must and will expect to live on beyond that line and will hope for good there; but the wicked man's hope as to that future life *will perish!*

8. The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead.

The righteous man is delivered out of his straitness—his cramped and perilous position; the wicked man comes into the same trouble from which the righteous is delivered. So God makes his retributions in time express his moral feelings toward both the righteous and the wicked.

9. A hypocrite with *his* mouth destroyeth his neighbor: but through knowledge shall the just be delivered.

The Hebrew word rendered "hypocrite" is not limited to this specific sense. It means the vile bad man, and here probably either the slanderer or the tempter.——But the righteous know too much to be ruined thus: their knowledge insures their deliverance from this danger.

10. When it goeth well with the righteous, the city rejoiceth: and when the wicked perish, *there is* shouting.

When the righteous prosper, *i. e.*, stand high in influence and authority, the city rejoiceth; and with good reason, out of regard

to its own welfare. So too when the wicked perish, there are shouts of joy; a fearful burden is lifted from the hearts of men. Thus forcibly does Solomon present in contrast the respective influence of good men and of bad in the city of their abode, and the consequent feelings of the people as the one class rises or the other falls.

11. By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted: but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.

The usage of the word "blessing" seems to favor if not even require the sense of benediction, or prayer; blessings invoked from God upon the city. Over against this, "the mouth of the wicked" must refer to *words* uttered; perhaps their imprecation, their curse. Who can think of the unmeasured curses invoked by wicked men in profane swearing and not forebode the wrath of God upon the city and the whole land where men so dishonor and contemn the majesty of Jehovah! Why should men in their mad profanity presume to dictate to the great God the curses he should bring on themselves and on their fellow-creatures!

12. He that is void of wisdom despiseth his neighbor: but a man of understanding holdeth his peace.

By very general consent critics read the first clause, not as in our English Bible, "Every unwise man despiseth his neighbor;" but, "He who despiseth his neighbor is unwise." This despising is supposed to manifest itself in contemptuous words; opposed to which the man of understanding is silent, careful not to utter, without good reason, whatever low opinion of others he may have. A wise maxim!

13. A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.

Whoever goes about tattling, from an excessive love of talk, with more or less propensity to slander, will inevitably reveal secrets. Putting him here over against the man of faithful spirit, Solomon implies that this talebearer has no faithfulness of spirit, but is altogether unreliable. Solomon would say, Beware of such a man or woman! They can by no means be trusted. The Mosaic law has a precept against this sin and folly: "Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: I am the Lord." (Lev. 19: 16.)

14. Where no counsel *is*, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors *there is* safety.

The word rendered "counsel" means primarily the steering of a vessel. Where there is no skill in conducting public affairs, analogous to that of the pilot among quicksands and rocks, there the State goes to wreck. Among a multitude of counsellors some

good suggestion is made and the wise will see its pertinence to the emergency.

15. He that is surety for a stranger shall smart *for it:* and he that hateth suretyship is sure.

He shall suffer severely who makes himself responsible for the debts of a stranger. The usual sense of "stranger" is foreigner, one who in those times was a heathen idolater. The ancient Canaanites were given to trade, and for this reason might need to borrow and be glad to get Hebrews to underwrite for them. Solomon was fully in the spirit of the Mosaic law therefore when he spake strongly against becoming surety for a stranger. In the common life of the Hebrew people which was almost exclusively agricultural, there would be very little occasion for suretyship.

16. A gracious woman retaineth honor; and strong *men* retain riches.

The original word rendered "gracious" means rather *gracefulness*, most naturally referring to beauty of person and grace of manner. By these qualities women both obtain and retain honor, even as vigorous active men do wealth. The verb for "retaineth" is used equally for obtaining as for retaining. I see no reason for restricting it to either sense to the exclusion of the other.

17. The merciful man doeth good to his own soul: but *he that is* cruel troubleth his own flesh.

The Hebrew in this verse is ambiguous, admitting two distinct constructions; either this, "The man who is merciful in character and to others, will be practically so to himself;" or this, "He who is merciful to himself will be so to others also." The last clause is similarly ambiguous.——The first named construction, that of our English Bible, seems to me preferable, the sentiment being that whoever blesses others, being merciful in spirit and character, will be sure to get a rich reward to himself. The very reaction upon himself is blessed; the showing of mercy to others is a rich mercy to himself. And vice versa, whoever is cruel to others and savage in temper, will torture his own flesh. The inevitable laws of our being compel this result.

18. The wicked worketh a deceitful work: but to him that soweth righteousness *shall be* a sure reward.

"A deceitful work" is here contrasted with "a sure reward." The Hebrew word for "work" readily admits the sense of reward or fruit of labor. Hence this sense must be accepted here. The wicked will fail of the reward they work for; it will prove delusive. But the man who sows righteousness will reap accordingly —a sure reward. These results follow from the laws of society; and they are sure in the end, because God reigns to bless the righteous, to curse the wicked.

19. As righteousness *tendeth* to life: so he that pursueth evil *pursueth it* to his own death.

As right conduct is unto life—bears toward it and insures it as its result, so one pursues evil to his own death. No other result can be expected; no other is possible. This sentiment is closely analogous to that in v. 18, and rests upon the same invariable laws of nature and of mind—upon the same infinite and perfect ruling of the all-wise Father.

20. They that are of a froward heart *are* abomination to the LORD: but *such as are* upright in *their* way *are* his delight.

This sentiment appears frequently in this book of proverbs. God abhors the froward of heart, but loves and delights in the upright of way. He being a Great Father, rejoicing in the welfare of his creatures, and displeased, yea, even indignant toward those who would mar the moral purity and so destroy the happiness which he seeks for all, why should it not be settled once for all in every mind, that if men will perversely war against God and the good he seeks for his children, they must expect his abhorrence and his severest penalties?

21. *Though* hand *join* in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished: but the seed of the righteous shall be delivered.

The first clause reads strictly, "Hand to hand," etc. Some critics, influenced by the parallelism ("the seed of the righteous"), take the sense to be, From generation to generation, the wicked shall be punished; it is the perpetual law of God's dealings with them. But, over against this, the righteous and their offspring, generation after generation, will be delivered.——The construction adopted in the English Bible is good, however, and perhaps comes more naturally from the original, viz.: However much the wicked may combine against God in their wicked schemes, they can by no means escape punishment. The righteous are always safe. Age after age they have salvation.

22. *As* a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, *so is* a fair woman which is without discretion.

Beauty without discretion, without the good sense which insures propriety of deportment, finds here a homely but a most truthful and telling illustration—good for some fair ones to think of! The oriental fashion of wearing jewels, pendent from the nose as well as from the ears, made this proverb the more caustic.

23. The desire of the righteous *is* only good: *but* the expectation of the wicked *is* wrath.

"Desire" and "expectation" are spoken of here, not with reference to their quality or character, but to their *results*, their ul-

timate fruits. The desires of the righteous issue in good only, in pure, unalloyed good; while the hopes and expectations of the wicked terminate at last in the wrath of God. Instead of the results they seek and hope for, they get only the terrible penalties of sin. God brings them to a solemn and fearful account.

24. There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and *there is* that withholdeth more than is meet, but *it tendeth* to poverty.

"Scattering" abroad (in benevolence, for the good of others,) does not impoverish. Men may give liberally, and through God's blessing upon them, their wealth may increase. So on the other hand, one withholds more than is just and right, but only to his greater poverty. It can not be wise to ignore the providence of God. Whom he will he blesses, and whom he will he smites with his curse. And his will is to honor those who honor him, and to put his mark of disapproval on those by whom he is lightly esteemed. (See 1 Sam. 2: 30.)

25. The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.

The soul of blessing [Heb.], *i. e.*, the soul that blesses others shall be enriched thereby—a proverb which follows in thought the first clause of the verse preceding. It is not only more blessed to give than to withhold; it is even more blessed to give than to receive. Giving, if done in simplicity and love, is sure to come back in blessings.

26. He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him: but blessing *shall be* upon the head of him that selleth *it.*

"That withholdeth," (*i. e.* from the hungry who need bread), hoarding and holding for the sake of a higher price, taking advantage of the necessities of the breadless. Those breadless mouths will curse him, nor they alone, for they are of God's family, and *his* curse too must fall on them.——On the other hand, the blessings of the poor (and of their Great Father no less), will come on the head of him that selleth it, promptly, in time of need, at fair and not at famine prices.——O, might these words of God be emblazoned on every store-house in all the land! Alas, that dealers in "corn" [all breadstuffs—indeed, all food] should so strangely ignore God's words, and so recklessly trample his promises and his threatenings beneath their feet! No wonder that financial reverses should come crashing down upon the speculator's ill-gotten gains! It is one of God's ways of fierce and terrible rebuke.——The same principle applies to fuel, and to whatever else is a necessity to the subsistence or the comfort of the masses.

27. He that diligently seeketh good procureth favor: but he that seeketh mischief, it shall come unto him.

The verb rendered "procureth" never has this sense unless by implication, but means *to seek*. I take the clause to mean that diligently seeking good—the best good of others—is equivalent to seeking the favor of God; amounts to the same thing and brings the same result. The sense of procuring is therefore implied but not expressed. This implication is the pith of the proverb.—— Over against this, he who seeks to bring mischief upon others, will, in fact, bring it down upon himself.

28. He that trusteth in his riches shall fall; but the righteous shall flourish as a branch.

The sense seems to be, He that trusteth to his riches for the good which can be gained only by righteousness and true virtue, will surely fail of it, and bring upon himself destruction; while the righteous will flourish as the living tree—a symbol jointly of beauty, productiveness, and perpetuity. "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon." (Ps. 92: 12. See also Ps. 52: 8, and 1: 3.)——This branch is not a limb only of a tree, but the young tree itself, perhaps coming up from the root of a former tree cut down, and therefore shooting up with the full strength of those old roots.

29. He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind: and the fool *shall be* servant to the wise of heart.

The key to reveal the sort of trouble thought of here is found in Prov. 15: 6, 27. It is that which comes of leaving one's household affairs to derangement, confusion, and waste, by negligence, mismanagement, and unthrift generally. The man who does this shall "inherit the wind"—a most unsubstantial thing to live on. We might say, He will sow to the wind—only scattering abroad. Managing so foolishly, he will become servant to the man of wise heart. Reducing himself to poverty, he must make himself the menial dependent of wiser men.

30. The fruit of the righteous *is* a tree of life: and he that winneth souls *is* wise.

In what special sense the fruit of the righteous is a tree of life is indicated in the latter clause. It is so because it is a blessed moral influence toward the winning of souls from sin and ruin. The results of such labor are indeed a tree of life, a permanent source of blessing, insuring the highest good of immortal souls for the whole eternity of their being. The terms "wise" and "righteous" are essentially equivalent, both being used here and elsewhere for the same class, viz.: the good man who is righteous, not wicked, and wise in the sense of fearing the Lord and departing from evil, and also of putting his active powers to the best possible account for the good of mankind.

31. Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner.

The word rendered "recompense" applies to both good deeds and bad. The proverb, therefore, calls attention to the fact that the righteous experience a measure of recompense [retribution] in this world, and infers that the wicked must, with more certainty, or more palpably, receive a measure of theirs. The writer does not necessarily imply that the recompense of either class is to be finished, made perfect, in this world, and by no means denies that a part, even the greater part, holds over to the future world.——The main question of doubt upon the verse turns on the reason why he affirms "much more" of the sinner's recompense. *Why* is the recompense of the sinner more certain or more palpable in this world than that of the righteous?——Some answer the question by saying that the sins [not the virtues] of the righteous man are thought of, the sense therefore being that if God punishes those sins (of inadvertence or neglect, or sins soon repented of and forsaken), much more will he punish in this world the deliberate, daring, whole-souled sins of the ungodly. This may be the true explanation. The chief objection to it is that the word used for "recompense" carries in itself no restriction to the punishment of sin, but applies equally to the rewards of virtue.——Why may not the reason for the "*much more*" be this—that as virtue and vice usually appear in this world, vice is far more strong, palpable, and, may we not say *perfect* than virtue, and hence the reasons, under God's moral government, for its being recompensed in this world are more imperative? Sin strikes boldly at Jehovah's throne, and challenges the Almighty to come to the rescue of his law, his cause, his people; how then can he refuse?——The apostle Pet. (1 Eph. 1: 18) quotes this verse from the Septuagint.

## CHAPTER XII.

1. Whoso loveth instruction loveth knowledge: but he that hateth reproof *is* brutish.

The words translated "instruction" and "reproof" contemplate the correction of mistakes, not in moral conduct only but in moral sentiments, in opinions pertaining to moral conduct, for they relate to knowledge and not merely to external acts. "Instruction," applied to moral truth, gives the true idea. The Hebrew word for "reproof" means almost identically the same thing. Hence if we retain this English word we must think of it as not harsh and stern, but affectionate, parental, designed simply to lead into

righteousness and peace.——To love instruction is equivalent to loving knowledge because it is the same thing in spirit and because it ensures the result of knowledge. But he who hates instruction acts the part of a brute and not of a rational man. So far forth as respects progress in knowledge and virtue he might as well have been made a brute since he persistently refuses to exercise those powers and capabilities which place him in a grade of being above the brute creation.——What a view is this of the folly of sin! The sinner, hating instruction, setting himself against the knowledge of moral duty and against all right use of such knowledge, is working himself down to brutishness as fast as possible!

2. A good *man* obtaineth favor of the LORD: but a man of wicked devices will he condemn.

This good man never plans mischief against others, but always plans and seeks their welfare. Hence the Lord approves his spirit and his life. But how can he fail to condemn the man who contrives to injure his neighbor? This man's spirit and life are utterly unlike God's.

3. A man shall not be established by wickedness: but the root of the righteous shall not be moved.

In the figure underlying this proverb, men are compared to trees. The righteous man gets well rooted, stands strong, thrives well, and is never moved; but the wicked never get a firm footing and rooting, but are blown down, torn up by the roots and left to rot. God is against them.

4. A virtuous woman *is* a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed *is* as rottenness in his bones.

The word "virtuous," no doubt includes moral purity and conjugal fidelity, but it also means more than this, viz.: those qualities which are portrayed so finely in Prov. 31: 10–31—a capable woman, adequate to the responsibilities of her position at the head of her household. Of such a wife the proverb implies that a husband may well be proud; while she who is incompetent and untrustworthy in these matters not only makes him ashamed but brings over him a weakness which is as rottenness in his bones.

5. The thoughts of the righteous *are* right: *but* the counsels of the wicked *are* deceit.

The word for "thoughts" means rather plans, purposes, those which involve intention, will. He means right, aims right.—— The "counsels" (the word properly means guidance) of the wicked are treacherous, having bad ends in view.

6. The words of the wicked *are* to lie in wait for blood: but the mouth of the upright shall deliver them.

The wicked talk and plot schemes of robbery and murder, as we have seen, chap. 1: 11–14. The expressed counsels of the upright avail to rescue those against whom such plots are devised. The word "them" manifestly means those whom the wicked seek to destroy. So the righteous counterwork and frustrate the schemes of the wicked.

7. The wicked are overthrown, and *are* not; but the house of the righteous shall stand.

In judgment upon the wicked, God often tears them up by the roots, destroying the entire family and leaving no trace behind; while the house, *i. e.*, household and family of the righteous, stand from generation to generation. This thought is expressed strongly in Ps. 37. It seems that under the ancient economy God often dealt with families as with nations, giving them a very manifest retribution *in time*, before the very eyes of the living.

8. A man shall be commended according to his wisdom: but he that is of a perverse heart shall be despised.

If the question be raised here whether "wisdom" on the one hand and a "perverse heart" on the other, refer to the intellect or to moral qualities and conduct, it may be said that the original word for "wisdom" is used naturally of the intellect, while the word "heart" is used in both the intellectual and the moral sense. The final answer to the question is that Solomon associates a clear and well-balanced mind with good moral sentiments and life; and on the other hand assumes the wicked man to be practically demented intellectually, either as the cause or the fruit of his wicked spirit. The doctrine of the proverb, therefore, is that a man will be praised according to the measure of his wisdom and virtue, his clear and just views of life and of duty; while the man whose wicked spirit distorts his practical views of duty and blunts his moral perceptions, deserves to be and will be only despised.

9. *He that is* despised, and hath a servant, *is* better than he that honoreth himself, and lacketh bread.

The Hebrew word here used for "despised" is not the same as that in the close of the preceding verse, and should be taken in a quite different sense. That was the contempt due to the man who had perverted his noblest powers, mental and moral, by sin. This denotes only a humble and lowly condition in life. It is better to move along little noticed or even disparaged and disesteemed, provided you have a servant and plenty of bread, than to make a great swell in the world, put on the airs of wealth and distinction, and yet really lack the commonest comforts of life.

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The sentiment: bread is more than show; the substantial comforts of life are worth more than display and the flattery or distinction you may gain thereby. This is sensible.

10. A righteous *man* regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked *are* cruel.

It is remarkable that the original word translated "regardeth" is the most common one for *know*. The righteous man *knoweth* the soul of his beast—probably in the sense of *acting* as if he was aware of the sensibilities of his ox, his horse, or his sheep, as if he knew they had a sensitive nature that would suffer under savage treatment, and therefore he abstains from abusing them. On the other hand the tenderest mercies of the wicked are only cruel—a strong way of saying that he has no mercies, no compassions for the suffering of man or beast.

11. He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread: but he that followeth vain *persons is* void of understanding.

The Hebrews were an agricultural people, subsisting from their soil. Their dense population demanded the best of tillage. This Solomon aimed to encourage. He who, instead of working his land, followed after idle men, out of business and doing nothing to purpose for the ends of life, would show himself without understanding, would play the fool, and would righteously come short of bread. Such men *ought* to go breadless.

12. The wicked desireth the net of evil *men:* but the root of the righteous yieldeth *fruit*.

Critics give the precise sense of this proverb variously. The word rendered "net" may mean "fortress" as in the English margin. The choice lies, therefore, between these two constructions; (1), That of our English version; Bad men covet the results which the wicked gain by their plots and schemes of wickedness, but the root of the righteous produces for them substantial fruit; or, (2), The wicked seek the protection of the wicked, their own class; but the righteous stand firm on their own foundation. Righteousness needs not the help of bad associates.——The former construction seems to me preferable, especially because the verb rendered "desireth" means precisely to *covet*, applicable therefore to treasures, the fruit of robbery or fraud; and because the word "root," applied to the righteous, looks toward productiveness in the line of provision for human subsistence.

13. The wicked is snared by the transgression of *his* lips: but the just shall come out of trouble.

The bad words of the wicked man, *i. e.*, slander or falsehood, become a snare to catch him and bring him to his just punish-

ment; but true integrity brings a man safely out of all the troubles in which unjust suspicion may have involved him.

14. A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of *his* mouth: and the recompense of a man's hands shall be rendered unto him.

The lips that speak well are no less sure of reward than the hands that work well. To show this the former is put over against the latter—lips against hands—with perhaps a shade of preference for the lips as the more fruitful of good.

15. The way of a fool *is* right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel *is* wise.

The gist of the proverb is that the way of the fool is so very right in his own eyes that he will not hearken to counsel. Hearkening to good counsel is the characteristic, not of the fool but of the wise. Self-conceit dooms a man to folly and to its consequent mischiefs.

16. A fool's wrath is presently known: but a prudent *man* covereth shame.

A fool's wrath is known at once; he takes no pains to conceal it. But the prudent, the wary and wise man, suppresses and thus conceals what it would disgrace him to expose. The next best thing to governing one's temper and overcoming the temptations to wrath is to govern its manifestations—to smother and keep it in.

17. *He that* speaketh truth sheweth forth righteousness: but a false witness deceit.

Both clauses refer properly to witnesses giving testimony. He who speaks truth sets forth the right of the case, presents the facts as they are and promotes the ends of justice; but the false witness gives a false view of the case and leads to its being misapprehended.——"Speaking truth" is here [Heb.] *breathing it forth*, as if it came naturally with and like his breath.

18. There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise *is* health.

This "speaking" in this proverb, quite unlike that in the one next preceding, is prating, babbling, pouring out words inconsiderately, recklessly. Such words pierce like daggers. But the tongue of the wise gives healing; their words lovingly heal the very wounds which the babbling slanderer inflicts. There is a precious balm in such words. Wise and good men take care not merely that they wound no one's feelings, but that they heal the wounds which they see inflicted by others. How much society owes to such healing words!

19. The lip of truth shall be established forever: but a lying tongue *is* but for a moment.

He who speaks truth invariably establishes a reputation for veracity which endures a life-time. The lying tongue will be believed but for a moment. The Hebrew has it, "*Only while I wink;*" only for the twinkling of an eye.

20. Deceit *is* in the heart of them that imagine evil: but to the counsellors of peace *is* joy.

"Deceit" on the one side and joy on the other do not seem properly antithetic. I take the gist of the proverb to lie in what is implied in the first clause over against what is expressed in the second, thus: Deceit and *therefore no joy*, but a conscious sense of meanness and guilt, are in the heart of those who devise mischief; but joy in abundance is for those who counsel and plan for others' peace, *i. e.*, welfare.

21. There shall no evil happen to the just: but the wicked shall be filled with mischief.

In an age when present retribution was almost the common law, this proverb must have been manifestly true; true to the eye of sense, true in its surface view. Taken in its ultimate bearings and results, its truth will surely become manifest, inasmuch as to the just "afflictions are only mercies in disguise," for God makes all things work together for good to those who love him.

22. Lying lips *are* abomination to the LORD: but they that deal truly *are* his delight.

Sentiment: God abhors falsehood and delights in those who deal truly. Acting out the truth is perhaps a little stronger than merely speaking it. It means a life of honest integrity in which both the words and the life are true.

23. A prudent man concealeth knowledge: but the heart of fools proclaimeth foolishness.

"Prudent" [Heb.] means discreet, forethoughtful, wary. Such a man considers beforehand what it is best to say and what not to say, and has the wisdom to withhold the latter. On the contrary, the heart of the fool prompts him to proclaim abroad his folly. He *must* be saying something and does not mind what he says.

24. The hand of the diligent shall bear rule: but the slothful shall be under tribute.

The word for "slothful" means properly *deceitful;* here in the sense of disappointing the expectations of his employers by his slackness, his utter want of diligence and attention. The diligent

in business are advanced to authority; the slothful and unreliable gravitate downward in society, and, like the weaker nation, come under tribute to the stronger.

25. Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad.

"Heaviness" [Heb.] is rather anxiety, fear, that which gives a sense of heaviness. Such a sense of dread, foreboding evil, depresses the heart, bows it down; but a cheering word gladdens it. This "good word" may be either good tidings, or a word whose comfort is in its kindly tone and manner. At how little cost sometimes may great burdens of grief be lifted from sad hearts!

26. The righteous *is* more excellent than his neighbor: but the way of the wicked seduceth them.

The sense given to the first clause in our English version can not be the true one, for who can know but his neighbor may be as good a man as he, or even better? Moreover this sense has no relation, antithetic or otherwise, to the second clause and therefore can not be the true one. The English translators seem to have entirely misconceived the sense of the verb rendered "more excellent." All the modern critics agree in giving the verb the sense of *pointing out, showing* to his neighbor the way. The proverb thus becomes lucid and complete: The righteous man shows his neighbor the way rightly; but the way pointed out by the wicked man leads him astray. The righteous man is a safe guide: the wicked man is not, but will lead you wrong.

27. The slothful *man* roasteth not that which he took in hunting: but the substance of a diligent man *is* precious.

In the first clause critics are divided between the meanings, *roasting* game, and *snaring* or taking it. Neither is bad; the more expressive is that of the English version—a man so remiss as not to roast his game after he has taken it. The Hebrew, moreover has it "*his*" game, which can more properly be said if the verb means to roast than if it means to *snare*, for if he fails to catch it by snaring as is here supposed, how comes it to be *his*?——Over against this, to the diligent man, all his wealth is precious, *i. e.*, turned to the best account.

28. In the way of righteousness *is* life; and *in* the pathway *thereof there is* no death.

"Life" in its highest and best sense, pure, perfect blessedness. No death is in that traveler's path. It opens to a glorious immortality.

## CHAPTER XIII.

1. A wise son *heareth* his father's instruction: but a scorner heareth not rebuke.

The son who is truly wise will gladly listen to the counsels of his father. The scorner, proud, disdainful, will not receive "rebuke" designed to correct his faults.

2. A man shall eat good by the fruit of *his* mouth: but the soul of the transgressors *shall eat* violence.

Good, *i. e.*, truthful words bring a man good fruit—results of good: but the perfidious, untruthful, will experience hurt. The Heb. word for "transgressors" properly means "perfidious," men of bad faith, of lying words.

3. He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: *but* he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction.

To guard the mouth is to guard the soul, the very life; but he that openeth his lips wide, to let come what may, speaking recklessly, shall have destruction. It is remarkable that so many proverbs set forth the evils of a loose and lying tongue, and that they represent these evils to be so very great. The Apostle James takes the same view: "The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity; it setteth on fire the course of nature, and it is set on fire of hell" (Jam. 3: 6).

4. The soul of the sluggard desireth, and *hath* nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.

The sluggard has a stomach and must get hungry. Having provided nothing, he must go hungry. The diligent will have enough. Solomon is justly severe upon sluggards, but strongly commends industry.

5. A righteous *man* hateth lying: but a wicked *man* is loathsome, and cometh to shame.

It is implied here that the righteous man, hating falsehood and sacredly adhering to truth, comes to honor thereby; while the wicked man, given to lying, comes to loathing and detestation.

6. Righteousness keepeth *him that is* upright in the way: but wickedness overthroweth the sinner.

Righteousness keepeth (guarding and protecting) him whose life is upright. "Righteousness" and "wickedness" are both personified here and considered, the one as saving, the other as destroying, each her respective votaries.

7. There is that maketh himself rich, yet *hath* nothing: *there is* that maketh himself poor, yet *hath* great riches.

Of course "maketh" is here in the sense only of *pretendeth*, would pass himself off as being. The one would be thought rich yet hath nothing; the other would be thought poor, etc. Under various circumstances and motives men may have some reasons in their own view for either course. In oriental countries, where property is often unsafe, men might be tempted to conceal their wealth and put on the appearance of extreme poverty. The other extreme, the pretense of great wealth, is more often assumed for the sake of honor and distinction.

8. The ransom of a man's life *are* his riches: but the poor heareth not rebuke.

Two constructions are given to this proverb; we have to choose between them. (1.) The rich man ransoms his life by his riches; but although riches are so manifestly useful, yet the poor man [who has made himself such by his indolence or folly] will not listen to the rebuke that seeks to rouse his indolence or cure his folly. (2.) As between riches and poverty the advantages are not all on one side; for while in the despotic governments of the east rich men are often dragged before magistrates on groundless charges for the mere purpose of exacting money; the poor man escapes this sort of prosecution altogether, there being in his case no motive for it. On this construction, the antithesis proper to a proverb is preserved, and it also has abundant illustrations in oriental life even to this day. For both reasons this construction is better than the other.

9. The light of the righteous rejoiceth: but the lamp of the wicked shall be put out.

The light of the righteous will be a joyful thing; but the lamp of the wicked will be put out. The pith of this proverb lies in the way of putting the first half of it. The precise antithesis would require this: The lamp of the righteous burns and will continue to burn brightly; but instead of this the writer puts the statement in the more general form: The light [not lamp] of the righteous *will be a perpetual joy*, tacitly compared to a lamp that shines all the night long in contrast with one that soon goes out.

10. Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well-advised *is* wisdom.

The force of the word "only" should be thrown upon the word "contention" and not upon the word "pride," the sense being, not that contention comes only from pride and from no other cause, but that contention only and nothing better or other than contention, can be expected from pride. Pride will produce it. Pride is the chief occasion of strife.——The proverb means that wisdom will be with those who take good counsel, implying that there is

but the least possible wisdom or none at all with the proud who get into quarrels to gratify their pride.

11. Wealth *gotten* by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labor shall increase.

The serious, not to say fatal, objection to the construction in our English version, is that the Hebrew does not say "gotten," and the word is too vital in that construction to be omitted. It is better, therefore, to read: "Wealth vanishes more than a breath," as a breath does, only more so; but he who accumulates by the hand will increase it. By its antithetic force the proverb implies that the wealth which vanishes so quickly is *not* that which is gathered by the hand, or which is cared for and preserved with the hand. The common law, the general fact, is that all other wealth except that in which the hand bears the prominent agency, both in procuring and preserving it, soon flees away, "quicker than a breath," says the strong figure of the proverb.

12. Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but *when* the desire cometh, *it is* a tree of life.

The long deferred realization of one's hope sickens the heart; it sinks discouraged as with a sense of sickness: but the coming of the thing desired is a "tree of life," a permanent and rich feast of good. See the sense of the phrase, "tree of life" (chap. 3: 18).

13. Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed: but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded.

The "word" and the "commandment" are here the revealed law of God. The precise sense of the first clause I take to be, He who despiseth God's word shall be *held* responsible—held as *with a cord* [the sense of the Hebrew] from which there can be no escape; but he who reverently fears and obeys it shall be recompensed.

14. The law of the wise *is* a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.

In this proverb the connection between the first part and the last is that the law of the wise both contemplates and secures the result of departing from fatal snares. It both aims to save men and does save them from ruin.

15. Good understanding giveth favor: but the way of transgressors *is* hard.

Good common sense, sound discretion, wins favor. The special type of "transgression" indicated by the Hebrew word is perfidy. The way of the perfidious is hard, can not win favor, but will, on the contrary, be detested.——The word for "hard" is thought by some to mean *like a sweeping torrent;* but other good critics prefer the sense, stony, rough.

16. Every prudent *man* dealeth with knowledge: but a fool layeth open *his* folly.

"Dealeth with," not in the sense of having business with, but of acting, managing his affairs wisely, with the requisite knowledge of whatever bears upon the case. Over against this, the fool is forever exposing his folly, bringing it out indiscreetly everywhere.

17. A wicked messenger falleth into mischief: but a faithful ambassador *is* health.

A messenger may be bad ["wicked"] either because he is slow, lazy, or because he is unreliable, not trustworthy. Contrasted here with the faithful one, the latter sense must be preferred. He falls into mischief, *i. e.*, trouble, because his employer, indignant at his perfidy, makes him smart for it. The comfort of a faithful ambassador is like that of a healing medicine, giving health in place of sickness.

18. Poverty and shame *shall be to* him that refuseth instruction: but he that regardeth reproof shall be honored.

"Reproof" has the broad sense of instruction and good counsel, designed to make one better. He who faithfully observes such counsels will come to honor. His character and life will be improved, his faults corrected, and then all will esteem and honor him. The opposite course will end not in shame only, but in poverty—a consideration adapted to take hold of the heart.

19. The desire accomplished is sweet to the soul: but *it is* abomination to fools to depart from evil.

The two parts of this proverb are each obviously true; but why are they brought into such juxtaposition? The gist of the proverb lies in what is *implied* [not expressed] in the latter clause.—— All men, whether fools or wise, appreciate and long for the joy of gratified desire. But fools who abhor departing from evil *can not get it.* Their life is a perpetual but fruitless endeavor to overcome and countervail the laws that link together sin and misery, folly and ruin. Abhorring to depart from evil, they must forever miss the joy of gratified desire. This I take to be the pith of the proverb.

20. He that walketh with wise *men* shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.

The Hebrew words of the last clause seem to mean, He who associates heartily with fools, *feeding* upon their words, will, like them, become wicked and be ruined. The proverb testifies to the power of the social law—the potent influence of associates—the good for good, and the evil for evil, and its consequent ruin.

21. Evil pursueth sinners: but to the righteous good shall be repaid.

The force of this proverb lies very much in the bold personification which attributes life and the spirit of a righteous retribution to both objective good and evil, *i. e.*, to prosperity and adversity. Evil *chaseth down* sinners, pursues them closely, and will overtake them surely; but good will requite the righteous. This is only another way of saying that God will bring evil upon sinners and good to the obedient, implying perhaps that he has wrought more or less of essential retribution into the very nature of things and the laws of society.

22. A good *man* leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner *is* laid up for the just.

In those days it was one of the manifestations of present retribution that good men laid up their wealth for even their grandchildren; but the sinner's wealth passed out of his family into the hands of the just. To some extent the same thing happens in all ages; the great estates of the wicked are soon squandered, and come into the hands of better men.

23. Much food *is in* the tillage of the poor: but there is *that is* destroyed for want of judgment.

In the last clause, the original seems to signify, not the mere lack of judgment, but positive injustice—the opposite of "judgment" when taken in the sense of justice. Fraud or violence, absolute injustice, ruins even rich men. It is therefore infinitely better to be poor, upright, and get abundance of bread by honest though hard labor, than to try to get rich by injustice, and so bring on yourself destruction.

24. He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.

"Hateth his son," *i. e.*, *acts* as if he hated him, suffering the greatest of evils to be fastened upon him, as if he were reckless of his welfare. This is said of him who withholds the proper means of correcting his son's faults. The term "rod" primarily applies to corporeal chastisement, but legitimately covers all judicious means for the same result. The father who truly loves his son seeks to corrĕct his faults betimes, *i. e.*, early.

25. The righteous eateth to the satisfying of his soul: but the belly of the wicked shall want.

In that age prĕeminently, but in all ages as the common law, the most abject poverty and suffering are the fruit of sin. The wicked, through their folly, their indolence, their criminal self-indulgence, or their outrages upon others' rights, involve themselves in pinching want.

## CHAPTER XIV.

1. Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands.

"House" is here rather in the sense of *estate*, the house considered as property, well ordered, and affording the conveniences and comforts of a home. The "woman" [wife] is thought of, not as a carpenter, but as a manager of her domestic concerns. Managing them prudently, she increases the comforts of the household, lessens the outgoes, builds up the estate. The foolish woman, managing badly, reverses this process, and like a Vandal, tears down the household with her hands. Solomon must have the credit of being a sagacious observer of the ways of housewives in the matter of economy and thrift.

2. He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the LORD: but *he that is* perverse in his ways despiseth him.

True probity and true piety will always be found together, for probity would insure piety, and piety would develop probity. The man of upright life will be a fearer of the Lord on the principle that "if any man will do his [God's] will, he shall know of the doctrine," etc., and *vice versa*, "if a man's deeds are evil, he will hate the light [respecting God] and will not come to it."——So, over against this, whoever is perverse in his moral ways of life must be a despiser of God, else he could not live so. And moreover, such a life begets such a spirit toward God.

3. In the mouth of the foolish *is* a rod of pride: but the lips of the wise shall preserve them.

Foolish words become a rod to scourge the pride of fools; while on the other hand, the lips of wise men inure to their protection. Both clauses may best refer to the reacting influence of folly and of wisdom respectively—the former to punish; the latter, to protect.

4. Where no oxen *are*, the crib *is* clean: but much increase *is* by the strength of the ox.

"Clean," in the sense of empty. Field-culture must be on a very small scale only, and with very meager returns, unless you have the strength of oxen.

5. A faithful witness will not lie: but a false witness will utter lies.

Men called to give testimony in courts of justice will act out their own character. The man of essential fidelity and veracity will not *lie* there; but the faithless man will pour out lies as he

does his breath. This comparison of lying to breathing is in the Hebrew verb, denoting that he has no sense of restraint or compunction to hold him to the truth. It comes more easy and natural to him to lie than not.

6. A scorner seeketh wisdom, and *findeth it* not: but knowledge *is* easy unto him that understandeth.

The scorner is, of course, puffed with self-conceit and pride, with no proper respect for either truth or those who have it and could teach him what it is. Such a man seeks truth to no purpose. In the expressive style of the Hebrew, "He seeketh truth, and there is none" [*i. e.*, for him]; truth is never found and taken possession of by such seeking. Lord Bacon (as quoted by Dr. Muenscher) says: "He that comes to seek after knowledge with a mind disposed to scorn and censure will be sure to find matter enough for his humor, but none for his instruction." Remarkably the scorner is here put over against the man of understanding, as if to imply that the former naturally lacks that love of truth and that sympathetic attraction toward it which intuitively sees and then seizes upon it. To a man who has these last-named qualities knowledge comes naturally and easily.——This doctrine assumes that good moral qualities are vital to the acquisition of truly valuable knowledge.

7. Go from the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceivest not *in him* the lips of knowledge.

Some critics read the last clause—"For thou wilt not find lips of knowledge in him." But the sense given in our English version seems to me more close to the original, which reads literally: "And thou hast not *discerned* lips of knowledge." When, after a reasonable opportunity for knowing a man, you discern not the lips of knowledge, retire from his presence; withdraw from his society; desist from all efforts either to get wisdom from him or to impart wisdom to him.

8. The wisdom of the prudent *is* to understand his way: but the folly of fools *is* deceit.

The wisdom of the discerning man turns to the practical use of understanding rightly his life-path and life-duty; but the folly of fools misguides them—leads them into error and ruin.——Some construe the latter clause—applies to the deceiving of others: but the antithesis is better as given above: wisdom helps a man to live right, while folly leads him to live fatally wrong.

9. Fools make a mock at sin: but among the righteous *there is* favor.

There are several constructions of this proverb worthy of being named and considered.——(1.) Sin mocks fools in the sense of disappointing their expectations—its pleasures being so much more

meager and its penalties being so much more terrible than they had thought.——(2.) The sin-offering mocks fools, availing them nothing because of their impenitence and folly, when they had hoped to get immunity from such offerings [Stuart].——(3.) Fools make light of sin, accounting it a trifling matter. This is the sense of our received version.——It is slightly in favor of either the first or the second construction that the noun "sin" and the verb "mock" agree in number, being singular, while the word for "fools" is plural. The second is also favored by the usual sense of the last word of the verse "favor," which very commonly denotes the *acceptance* of a true offering before God. It lies against both these constructions that the word "mocks," implying derisiveness, does not truly represent the feeling of God, nor of sin or of a sin-offering when personified and thus made to represent the heart of God. This seems to me the main objection to those constructions. "Mocking" truthfully represents the sinner's feeling, but not God's. On this ground I prefer the last-named construction.——This word for "sin" has two senses; either guilt, blameworthiness, or the trespass-offerings of the Mosaic law: here, I think, the former. Fools scoff at and scornfully repel the idea of personal guilt; nor do they care much if the fact of wrong-doing is fastened upon them.——The antithesis lies (as often) between what is assumed in the first clause and asserted in the second, thus: Fools mock at sin and therefore incur God's wrath [not his favor]; but the righteous have his favor, and what is thus true of God's favor is true also of the esteem of all right thinking moral agents in the universe.

10. The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy.

Each individual heart knows its own sorrows and its own joys as no other merely human mind can know them. In the confidence and unrestrained communion of friendship we may approximate to a knowledge of each other's joys and sorrows: it is but an approximation. Only in Jesus is there an exception to this otherwise universal law, for his infinite mind knows perfectly every sorrow and every joy of our being, and his perfect sympathies [almost] make our joys and sorrows his own! O might we only believe this and find therein all the ministries of consolation and strength which it has to give!

11. The house of the wicked shall be overthrown; but the tabernacle of the upright shall flourish.

Two beautiful points are prominent in this proverb, viz.: (1) the antithesis between "house" and "tent;" the *house* of the wicked, built as he supposes of most substantial material, wood, brick, or stone, shall yet be razed to the ground; while the *tent* of the upright, fragile in itself, put up so as to be easily taken down, shall yet stand, and long outlast the house of the wicked.——(2.)

This tent is said to "flourish," like a plant, shrub, or tree, well-rooted, having a life-power of its own, and therefore blooming in beauty as well as living with its own life and only waxing the stronger for the coming and going of the seasons and for all the storms that beat upon it. All this is involved in the Hebrew verb here rendered "flourish."

12. There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death.

The obvious sense of this proverb is no doubt the true one, viz.: that a way of living (in the moral sense of life) may seem right to a man, and yet be wrong and end in death. Men may be deceived by their associates, or they may deceive themselves, and so may assume what is utterly wrong to be, at least in their case, right. Hence the somewhat popular doctrine that it matters not what a man believes provided he be sincere, is a fatal mistake, for a man may think himself very sincere in accepting and holding pernicious error and in pursuing a fatally wrong course of life. Such sincere but ruinous errors *may* be held by the human mind, and the corresponding course of life may be pursued, ending in death. For example, Saul of Tarsus for a long time "verily thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." Would his verily thinking so have saved him from damnation? Did that thinking so make it right for him to persecute Jesus? Could he have thought so at all if his heart had been thoroughly honest and right before God?——Is there any help against this liability to fatal mistake? Most certainly. "If any man will do the will of God, he may know" with certainty all the truth he needs to know for his salvation. It is only when men love darkness rather than light that they embrace fatal error. When men love sin exceedingly and labor hard to make themselves think it right for them in their circumstances, they invite delusion into their souls, and delusion is almost certain to come to their (transient) relief, but to their swift and certain destruction.——This proverb, affirming a most momentous truth, appears again, 16: 25, also one part of it, 12: 15.

13. Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth *is* heaviness.

Two facts of human experience are involved here: (1) That laughter is sometimes a thin disguise to conceal a sad heart; (2) That the reaction which follows vain mirth is often the most painful heaviness. This passion for laughter, which assumes it to be very much the chief good of life, is a miserable folly.

14. The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man *shall be satisfied* from himself.

The backslider in heart, apostate from God, shall be sated

with his own ways, shall have enough and more than enough of the bitter fruits of his apostacy. On the contrary, the good man will find ample sources of joy in himself. Joy springs up spontaneously out of his benevolent heart.——The turn of the thought which is the gist of the proverb lies in the play upon the sense of the word rendered "filled," which is obviously to be supplied in the last clause. The backslider shall be filled with the sorrow that comes from his backsliding: the good man shall be filled with the joy of his steadfast goodness.——Another construction is approved by Stuart, who supplies, in the last clause, not the verb *filled*, but some other, *e. g.*, removes; reading the last clause—"But the good man removes away from him," the backslider. But this (without cause) sacrifices all corresponding relation between the two clauses, and improperly supplies in the last clause, not the verb expressed in the first, but another taken up capriciously.

15. The simple believeth every word: but the prudent *man* looketh well to his going.

The "simple" in the sense of Solomon are the credulous and susceptible who are open to every impression, especially if evil, and who have no forethoughtful wariness in choosing their path of life. The point of the proverb is that while the prudent man thinks before he acts, the simple believes whatever is said to him and thinks not.

16. A wise *man* feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth and is confident.

"Rageth" is not the best word here to give the sense of the original or to fit the other part of the description, since it suggests the passion of anger, whereas the true sense is that of pride—an insolent and reckless bearing, corresponding to the last word, *self-confident*—having no fear of God before his eyes. The wise man fears to sin; has a reverential fear of God, and hence departs from evil. The fool is fearless, dashing, reckless, breaking over all restraint.

17. *He that is* soon angry dealeth foolishly: and a man of wicked devices is hated.

The man of quick, hasty passions acts foolishly, meaning either that he is foolish in the very fact of giving way to this sudden excitement, or that he will be sure, under his uncontrolled passion, to do foolish things, such as he ought to be ashamed of—the latter being probably the leading thought.——On the other hand, the man who conceals his anger, but craftily plots mischief, will be hated. He who is soon angry and soon over it may have many amiable traits of character, and his weakness of passion may rather evoke your pity than your abhorrence. But all must hate the man of wicked devices. If you know that he is equal

to the protracted guilt of plotting mischief and holding his heart upon it day after day with no compunctions, you are afraid of him; you dare not trust him; you set him down as a radically bad man, an enemy of his race.

18. The simple inherit folly: but the prudent are crowned with knowledge.

For the sense of the word "simple," see v. 15. Such men have only folly and its consequent disgrace as their inheritance—the reward of their careless, unthinking spirit and of their reckless life. But the prudent, who sagaciously consider both truth and duty, embrace true knowledge—become masters of it, and wear it as their crown of honor. The possession of knowledge in the one case stands over against the possession of ignorance and folly in the other; and the consequent honor in the former case makes a second antithesis with the implied disgrace in the latter. The word "crown" implies the idea of honor.

19. The evil bow before the good; and the wicked at the gates of the righteous.

Righteous and good men gain possession of honor, competence, and therefore naturally of power, so that before them the wicked bow in deference and homage, perhaps in supplication for favors. The case of the good Joseph and his evil-minded and envious brethren is in point, and perhaps was in the mind of the writer.

20. The poor is hated even of his own neighbor: but the rich *hath* many friends.

Some of the proverbs aim to state facts of human life, to be thought of as facts pregnant with various instruction, but not as examples worthy of imitation. "Hate" is quite too strong a word for this connection if we are to conceive of the writer as designedly suggesting that we ought to do the same. Indeed it is a little too strong to represent the average sentiments of men in our age of the world. It must be conceded that usually the rich are courted —the poor neglected; the rich held in high honor—the poor in relatively low esteem. From the rich, every man has more or less hope of some sort of favor, but from the poor he expects no such good. So much may be said of human life as we see it. But in the last clause, the marginal reading, "many love the rich," is the precise rendering of the Hebrew, so that hate and love are put in direct antithesis. Even his own neighbors hate the poor man, while many love the rich. I suggest that the proverb should be interpreted in the light of the peculiar features of those early ages of time, when poverty was associated with not only folly, but crime, and prosperity in the form of wealth was regarded as the special reward of the upright, virtuous man. These sentiments stand out prominently in various proverbs, as also in the Old Testament somewhat generally.——It may be noted that the next

proverb seems to have been designed to guard against the abuse of this.

21. He that despiseth his neighbor sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy *is* he.

Even he who has made himself poor by folly or crime should not be despised and treated contemptuously, much less he who has become poor by misfortune. Contempt toward a neighbor is always sinful, and all men, live where they may, are neighbors in the application of this principle. In this proverb, "despising" stands over against "having mercy," and therefore implies an unforgiving, unfeeling, hard spirit.——The last clause might well be read, "Blessed is he who hath mercy on the poor!"

22. Do they not err that devise evil? but mercy and truth *shall be* to them that devise good.

The original word for "devise" includes both plotting and laboring for an end. He who in this sense deviseth mischief will miss his end, to his ruin; while mercy and truth will be the reward of those who devise good. The intent of the heart determines the moral character of the act, and therefore the sort of retribution that righteously follows.

23. In all labor there is profit; but the talk of the lips *tendeth* only to penury.

All well-directed labor naturally brings some useful returns, but lip-words are only toward want. Mere talk, words having no worthy aim, work out only poverty. Probably the writer meant that those who talk when they should work will miss the laborer's harvest.

24. The crown of the wise *is* their riches: *but* the foolishness of fools *is* folly.

This proverb is difficult of interpretation, especially because the last clause reads literally, "The folly of fools is folly," the word for "folly" being repeated. Some critics (*e. g.*, Gesenius, Stuart), assume a play upon two supposed senses of the word for folly, thus: The precedence [promotion] of fools tends only to greater folly, or only serves to manifest their folly the more. This is opposed to the influence of wealth upon the wise which only serves to adorn their life, and, like a crown, make their wisdom the more conspicuous.——Others give the proverb this sense: The riches they acquire add new honors to the wise, inasmuch as they still deport themselves wisely and worthily; but the folly of fools will still be folly though they acquire never so much wealth. Wealth will make them no wiser, and hence will confer upon them no honor. They will only play the fool the more conspicuously.—— I prefer the latter construction.

25. A true witness delivereth souls: but a deceitful *witness* speaketh lies.

"Delivereth souls," *i. e.*, of those whose lives are imperiled by false accusation before the civil tribunals. On the contrary, a deceitful witness pours out lies, and consequently, far from delivering the lives of the innocent, augments their peril. This implied antithesis is due to the genius of the proverb.

26. In the fear of the LORD *is* strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge.

The pith of the first clause is in its apparent paradox; fear in the sense of anxious apprehension being the opposite of confidence when taken in its proper sense—the repose of trust. But the fear of the Lord is true piety, and this involves such a committal of ourselves and of all our interests to God as gives us strong confidence. So fearing him, we have the utmost reason to confide in his wisdom and love. He who, in this blessed and scriptural sense, fears God will have nothing else to fear.——In the last clause *his* children may grammatically be either the children of him who thus fears God, or the children of God himself—the sense in the former case being that the blessings of piety descend to one's children; in the latter, that naturally all the true children of God must have a refuge in their great Father. The latter sense is universally true; the former, only generally.

27. The fear of the LORD *is* a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.

Compare 13: 14, where the same thing is said of "the law of the wise" as is said here of "the fear of the Lord," and said in the same sense.

28. In the multitude of people *is* the king's honor: but in the want of people *is* the destruction of the prince.

To have a populous realm and numerous subjects is an honor to a king; and, as is implied here, a source of strength to his kingdom; while the lack of people works his destruction. Other things being equal, the power of a kingdom will be as the number of its subjects. Hence the proverb suggests that it must be a wise policy for every king to encourage the increase of population within his realm. All history shows that the natural means for this purpose are industry and virtue; the comforts of life; the protection of all the natural rights of mankind. Let rulers remember that it is their honor and safety to shape their ruling to promote these ends.

29. *He that is* slow to wrath *is* of great understanding: but *he that is* hasty of spirit exalteth folly.

The two personages described here are doubly contrasted. The one is slow to anger; the other quick and hasty; the former has great wisdom and evinces it prominently by his remarkable self-control; the latter not only has great folly but *sets it up on high* before all observers. Every one sees and feels how foolish it is to be quick tempered and to let one's passions flash suddenly into flame with no self-control.

30. A sound heart *is* the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones.

The doctrine of this proverb is the physiological effect of the mind upon the body. A calm, placid heart [better than "sound"] gives life to the flesh in the sense of augmenting the vital forces and conducing to health and therefore to life; while, on the other hand, envy, forever disquieting the soul, works rottenness of the bones. Probably the Hebrews were familiar with the physiological fact that an unhappy state of mind retards the healing of broken bones.

31. He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoreth him hath mercy on the poor.

In so far as the poor are made so by the providence of God, it is especially true that to oppress them because they are poor is to reproach him whose providential agency has been the means or occasion of their poverty.——In a yet broader sense, all the poor are under God's protection against unrighteous oppression, so that whoever tramples on God's law forbidding the oppression of the poor contemns God himself. The former sense, however, harmonizes better with the word "reproach."——The last clause makes a more direct antithesis if read, "He who hath mercy on the poor does honor to his Maker." Both clauses concur to show how our treatment of God's poor expresses our regard for himself. Oppressing them, we reproach him; compassionating them, we do him honor. Corresponding to which are the words of Jesus: "Inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of these, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25: 40). Do we practically think so?

32. The wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath hope in his death.

This proverb draws the fearful contrast between the wicked and the righteous in their death, and leaves us to infer the yet more fearful contrast in their respective destinies in the life beyond. "The wicked are *driven* away," pressed and forced along by resistless agencies of disease or disaster, their guilty souls shrinking, recoiling, and struggling in vain against the iron power of death and retribution. "They are driven away *in their wickedness*," no penitence in their hearts and no pardon from the throne of a just God, and as the antithesis of the proverb implies, *with*

*no hope*, such as the righteous have in their death. Alas! this is the bitterness of his lot! No ray of hope gleams upon the lurid darkness of his impending and engulfing doom! As he lived a sinner, so he dies a sinner, and goes a sinner into that other world where such enemies of God and of all goodness have their "*own place.*"

In the strongest contrast with this stands the death of the righteous. A single element in his case suffices to suggest all the rest; he "has hope in his death." But this word "hope" must not be taken in the low sense of a doubtful anticipation, a shade of hopefulness struggling against many misgivings and fears. The word is stronger and richer far than that. It means that he is *trustful* and has a refuge, full of consolation, in the hour of his death. God is that refuge. God witnesses to his soul of his gracious presence and of his quenchless, ever faithful love. Hence the righteous man's hope dictates this song: "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." (Ps. 23: 4).

It has been the fashion for a class of critics to deny that the old patriarchs and prophets had any knowledge of a future state of rewards and punishments. Suppose one of those critics should accost Solomon—Do you know any thing about the wicked or the righteous after death? Solomon would at least have so much as this to answer: I have carefully observed the death of the two opposite classes. I have seen hundreds of bad men die, driven away in their wickedness; I also saw my venerable father die with those blessed words on his tongue—"Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil." I have seen many a good man die in the spirit of a sustaining trust in his God; and now, believing that death changes no man's moral character and that the same God rules over both this world and the next, I must conclude that these foreshadowings of the future which stand out so boldly in the hour of death are God's witnesses to the contrast in destiny which we shall all find when we enter the world to come.——This is the logic of the proverb before us. How much direct revelation from God on this point he or his fathers before him had, he does not say. Let it suffice us just here to interpret well the words he gives us and to bring the truths they teach us home to our very hearts!

33. Wisdom resteth in the heart of him that hath understanding: but *that which is* in the midst of fools is made known.

Wisdom finds a natural home in the heart of the intelligent and discreet; they know more than they say, and give you the impression of reserved force behind, ready for all future emergencies.——On the other hand, fools know but little and know not how to conceal or reserve any portion of that.——This senti-

ment which puts it as a characteristic of fools to blurt forth all they think appears in various proverbs, *e. g.*, 12: 13 and 13: 14 and 15: 2.——A proper regard to this proverb would abate much of the foolish talking of our world for reputation's sake, if not from discretion.

34. Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin *is* a reproach to any people.

This proverb speaks of righteousness and sin as pertaining either to the government or to the general character of a people; or more probably to both, since in general the government will reflect the average sentiment and character of the people. The point of the antithesis seems to be not so much strength on the one hand and weakness on the other, as honor in the one case and shame in the other. Righteousness in the sense of rectitude, a just administration of government and a people bearing themselves justly toward each other but especially toward other nations, will lift the nation high in honor; while on the other hand sin, in the strong sense of national outrages against the great laws of our common humanity, the oppression of the weak, unjust wars, tyrannous exactions—these are the reproach of nations.——The Hebrew word standing here for "reproach" occurs but once elsewhere in this sense, viz.: Lev. 20: 17; "It is a wicked thing"—said of a most unnatural crime against the chastity and purity of the family relation.——The Hebrew words for "nation" and "people" are used for Gentiles as distinct from Jews, and therefore include all the nations of all time, Gentiles by specification, and *a fortiori* the Jews and all Christian nations of every age, for with clearer light comes greater responsibility and greater guilt and shame for national sin.

35. The king's favor *is* toward a wise servant: but his wrath is *against* him that causeth shame.

The servant is thought of here as causing shame to his king by his indiscretions and by disappointing his reasonable expectations. Such a servant justly incurs the king's displeasure. How can he endure such a servant?

## CHAPTER XV.

1. A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.

An answer soft, not in the sense of weak, silly, but of mild and soothing, *turns back* wrath; abates its virus, averts its aim, makes the wrathful man ashamed. But irritating words, such as cause

pain, fire up the passion of anger to more fearful fury. Even gentle tones of voice and a quiet manner and bearing have a marvelous power to turn away wrath; even as sharp and violent tones on the contrary excite angry passions to a fiercer flame.

These words are a fine example of the useful proverb—terse, sententious, full of good sense and practical truth, so put as to be easily remembered and readily carried in the mind for every-day use.

2. The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness.

The special sense in which the tongue of the wise makes good use of knowledge I take to be that the wise man speaks on fit occasions; is wise in manner and in adaptation to times and circumstances; and also, not least, that he uses his skill to make knowledge pleasing and attractive to the learner.——Over against this, the mouth of fools pours forth folly as an inverted bottle lets out its waters, bubbling, gurgling, splurging, as if to caution bystanders to keep out of the way. This seems to be the figure involved in the verb here used. This proverb is not lacking in pith and power.

3. The eyes of the LORD *are* in every place, beholding the evil and the good.

The eye is the best possible symbol from the material world to represent the piercing, pervading, perfect knowledge of the omniscient mind. To say "they are in every place" gives us the conception of his omnipresence, reaching every possible sphere and mode of created existence, showing that the darkness and the light are both alike to him, and that there is no hiding in any secret place where his mind shall not know our thoughts and deeds most perfectly. The word for "beholding" means scanning, searching out, the term commonly used for the responsible service of the *watchman* whose sole concern is *to see.*——The words, "the evil and the good," mean not evil and good in the abstract, but evil men and good men—the responsible agents who are doing either evil or good. The infinite God is bound to take cognizance of their doings.——This proverb puts a great and vital truth in its most practical form.

4. A wholesome tongue *is* a tree of life: but perverseness therein *is* a breach in the spirit.

This proverb, like vs. 1, 2, treats of the power of the tongue. A tongue *mild* [better than "wholesome"] is a permanent blessing ["tree of life"]; but one that works perversely breaks the heart, comes down crashing with dire blows into the chambers of the soul. Men feel such inflictions keenly. What breaking is like that of the spirit?

5. A fool despiseth his father's instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent.

In the last clause "is prudent," should rather be "*will act prudently.*" Then the antithesis of the proverb lies between what is implied in the first clause and what is affirmed in the second, thus: The fool despiseth his father's instruction and *therefore* will *act foolishly*, while he who regards reproof will be guided thereby to act wisely. Of course the son who scorns his father's counsels is very sure to play the fool and go wrong, and so make his life a failure.

6. In the house of the righteous *is* much treasure: but in the revenues of the wicked is trouble.

The word "revenues," as here used, means *income* in general. But the assumption is that the income of wicked men has been gained by bad means, and therefore brings him trouble. Over against this, the righteous man has in his house not only much treasure, but treasure that does him much good, that brings not trouble but real comfort. In this point lies the gist, the real antithesis, of the proverb.

7. The lips of the wise disperse knowledge: but the heart of the foolish *doeth* not so.

The last word of the verse "*so*" is by general consent of modern critics a noun (as in Isa. 16: 6), meaning things not sound, not reliable, but vain, empty, valueless. Then, there being no verb expressed in the last clause, the choice lies between reading it, The heart of the foolish *is* an unsound, valueless thing; or with the verb of the clause preceding, *disperses*, *scatters abroad*, valueless things. The latter is the best.

8. The sacrifice of the wicked *is* an abomination to the LORD: but the prayer of the upright *is* his delight.

The sacrifice offered by the wicked, God abhors for the twofold reason—that it lacks sincerity, love, the element of true worship and homage; and also, that it has sinister ends in view, *e. g.*, to propitiate God's favor upon a heart and life of sin; to buy an indulgence; it being an effort to offset so much cost of sacrifice against the permission to go on in sin and rebellion without incurring the awful penalties thereof.——On the other hand, the mere prayer of the upright, even though he may have no costly sacrifice to give, is God's delight. The offering of the heart insures his favor.

9. The way of the wicked *is* an abomination unto the LORD; but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness.

The last preceding proverb respects the offering of religious

sacrifices and prayer; this relates to the moralities of life. God abhors the conduct of the wicked, the way they live, the things they do; while those who follow *earnestly* after righteousness [the sense of the Hebrew verb as it stands here] God truly loves.

10. Correction *is* grievous unto him that forsaketh the way: *and* he that hateth reproof shall die.

The first clause does not mean merely that correction is unpleasant, repulsive to one who forsakes the right way of life; but this, that a sore, severe correction will befall him. A grievous correction will be the lot of those who forsake the way. To this the last clause corresponds: he who hateth reproof shall die.——Upon the last word, the question must arise, *What death* will he die? Can it be merely that death which is the common lot of all, of the good and the bad with equal certainty? This would amount to no distinctive threatening whatever. We must, therefore, assume that this death involves the fearful penalties of the divine law—the death that lies beyond the dissolution of this mortal body—the death which is for the wicked alone.

11. Hell and destruction *are* before the LORD: how much more then the hearts of the children of men?

The word for "hell" used here is *Sheol*, meaning the underworld, the supposed abode of the dead, thought of as the deepest and darkest of all places. The word for "destruction" (abaddon), corresponding to the Greek apolluōn (Eng. apollyon), is here another name for the same place. The proverb affirms that this deepest and darkest of places is not too dark for the eye of God to pierce through, but is present to his view, all exposed and naked before him. How much more then must this be true of the hearts of all the sons of men? The sentiment is therefore essentially the same as in v. 3 above.

12. A scorner loveth not one that reproveth him: neither will he go unto the wise.

By his very nature the scorner is proud and disdains reproof. Even the wisdom of the wisest of men has no attraction for him.

13. A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.

"Merry" in the sense of joyful. A joyous heart expresses itself in a cheerful face, but by sorrow [vexation] of heart, the spirit is depressed, dejected, and with the spirit, the countenance also, though this is implied, not expressed.

14. The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge: but the mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness.

The heart of the thoughtful [intelligent] will seek additional

knowledge. The last clause I take to mean that fools love to talk nonsense; they enjoy it as a hungry man his bread; consequently they have no impulses toward the acquisition of knowledge. Ignorance and folly answer the purpose of their heart's desire even better! Alas, for such folly in souls endowed by their Creator with capacities for the noblest science!

15. All the days of the afflicted *are* evil: but he that is of a merry heart *hath* a continual feast.

The old English sense of the word "merry" was not jolly, mirthful, but cheerful, serene—perhaps through sweet resignation to the will of God. The Hebrew word in this case means *good*, a good heart, or perhaps *goodness* of heart. The doctrine of the proverb is that although the outward life and surroundings of the afflicted may be wholly sad and comfortless, yet a good heart rises nobly above their depressing influence and becomes like a perpetual feast—a source of joy at once pure and perennial. So may the spirit of man assert its superiority to the flesh—the inner man to the outer.

16. Better *is* little with the fear of the LORD, than great treasure and trouble therewith.

This sentiment is at once plain and rich. The blessing of God on the humblest crust of bread is sweeter than the abundance of earthly riches, with trouble ever attending.——"The fear of the Lord" is used here in the large sense of true piety, including love and trust. It is the filial spirit of sonship, reposing in the universal providence of a Great Father, and rejoicing in his wisdom to withhold as truly as in his bounty to bestow.——The trouble incident to "great treasure" is rarely estimated at its full measure. Men are not wont to consider how many have lost their reason under the perpetual strain of the cares and anxieties of a great estate. Monomaniacy is often God's mode of retributive visitation upon the sin of an excessive love of money.——Over against this, how blessed are those who have only the more of God's presence and love, as they have less of earth and of things earthly!

17. Better *is* a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.

Even leaving the favor and love of God out of account, there are things in the line of the social affections which far more than counterbalance the ills of frugal or even meager fare. A dinner of herbs, with the sweet charities of the heart superadded, stands indefinitely far before the stall-fed ox, served up amid the asperities and malignities of cherished hate.——This again is a fine example of the moral proverb, terse and telling in the form of it; wholesome and forcible in sentiment and in its social bearings.

18. A wrathful man stirreth up strife: but *he that is* slow to anger appeaseth strife.

This proverb may be applied to the relative influence of the passionate and of the self-governed respectively upon *other people's quarrels*, or to their influence upon *their own*. The same qualities of spirit and manner will produce the same results in either case. Compare 29: 22 and 28: 25.

19. The way of the slothful *man is* a hedge of thorns: but the way of the righteous *is* made plain.

The sluggard makes his own pathway like a thorn-hedge—almost impassable and always full of annoyances and troubles; while the righteous man makes his as a prepared causeway, a turnpiked road. A road *raised, thrown up*, is the sense of the Hebrew.——The writer can not mean that the sluggard always *finds* his way made for him a thorn-hedge—the circumstances of his life always such as render useful activity almost hopeless to him. This would ascribe to divine providence what is due to his own laziness.—— The remarkable thing in this proverb is the antithesis between the sluggard on the one hand and the righteous man on the other—as if to suggest that such laziness is a sin—a moral obliquity —which never appears in a truly upright man.

20. A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish man despiseth his mother.

See essentially the same in 10: 1, and also in 29: 3. Comparing this proverb with that in 10: 1, we have "man" instead of "son," as if to suggest the baseness of such contempt of one's mother, holding on from the tender years of the boy into the maturity of manhood. Also observe that instead of saying, "is the heaviness of his mother," he says what is naturally equivalent, "despiseth his mother." Folly (always associated with sin and crime) is most certain to manifest itself in contempt of one's mother. Maternal counsel and prayer will surely be set at naught by the man of folly and crime. How many mothers' hearts are doomed, from this cause, to bear a daily load of almost crushing heaviness!

21. Folly *is* joy to *him that is* destitute of wisdom: but a man of understanding walketh uprightly.

The man who lacks a heart [Heb.] finds a low, miserable pleasure in his folly, and consequently he will not forsake his foolish life nor cease from his folly of soul. This logical consequent seems to be put in antithesis with the natural bent of the intelligent wise man toward walking uprightly. The one will not and the other will walk right, because the former loves his folly, and the latter loves wisdom and all her ways.

22. Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counselors they are established.

See 11: 14. The best of plans need wisdom for their effective execution. Since all men, even though wise, do not look from the same stand-point, and hence see various aspects of the same thing, it comes to pass that "a multitude of counselors" enhances the probability of attaining the best wisdom and the safest results.

23. A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word *spoken* in due season, how good *is it!*

I take the sense to be that a man enjoys giving a discreet and wise answer. He feels a personal satisfaction in the exercise of the kindness and good-will which it involves, and also in imparting useful knowledge or good advice. Moreover, a word spoken in good time, well put, how good it appears to others! How much they, too, enjoy it!

24. The way of life *is* above to the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath.

"Above" is used precisely in the sense of *upward*. The wise man's chosen way of living tends *upward*, far as possible *away* from hell below. He keeps himself remote and bends his pathway far from the deep abyss of perdition beneath. The proverb seems to involve these two ideas: that he *aims* to remove himself as far as possible from the place and the doom of the wicked; and that such is in fact the *result* of his chosen path of life.

25. The LORD will destroy the house of the proud: but he will establish the border of the widow.

"House" includes the estate, the wealth of the proud. The Lord abhors them, and therefore will bring upon them the present retributions of his righteous providence. But on the other hand, the widow, defenseless in herself, will be the special object of his care. To "establish her border," *i. e.*, the boundary lines of her landed estate, covers the whole idea of assured protection and defense. As to this world's good, the former class God will overthrow; the latter, he will enlarge in their straits and make sure to them all needful good.

26. The thoughts of the wicked *are* an abomination to the LORD: but *the words* of the pure *are* pleasant words.

The Hebrew word for "thoughts," is rather *devices*. The plottings of evil are an abomination to the Lord; but amiable words are pure, acceptable before him. Words spoken with kind purpose, good intention, are pure in his sight, like the appointed sacrificial offerings. I prefer this construction of the last clause to that given in the English version for two reasons: (1.) The Hebrew word for "pure" is naturally applied to sacrificial offer-

ings rather than to pure-minded men; and (2.) In this construction, the antithesis with the previous clause is more direct—the devices of the wicked placed over against words flavored with grace, goodness.

27. He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house; but he that hateth gifts shall live.

"Gifts" in the sense of bribes. "Live," in the broad sense of all prosperity, real *life*. He who is so greedy of gain as to accept bribes and to allow himself as a judge to give corrupt decisions therefor, brings trouble upon his house, including perhaps both his family and his estate. The money he gets in this way will curse him and his children after him.

28. The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things.

"Studieth," in the sense of considering well in order to answer discreetly. On the other hand the mouth of the wicked discharges the virus of a bad heart with no reserve, no forethoughtful consideration. The one thinks seriously before he speaks; the other only lifts the floodgates and lets his pent-up wickedness gush out.

29. The LORD *is* far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous.

"The Lord is far from the wicked" both in sympathy and in fact—so far that he hears not their wicked prayer. Of course this conception of the Lord as far away from the wicked pertains to his *moral* relations and feelings toward them, and has no bearing upon his omniscience—does not imply that he is too far removed to mark and note their deeds or to hold them responsible for their sins.

30. The light of the eyes rejoiceth the heart: *and* a good report maketh the bones fat.

As light is pleasant to the eye and breathes cheerfulness through the heart, so good tidings thrill the very nerves (so we should express it), but the Hebrew writer thinks of the bones as made full of marrow by that which diffuses joy through the soul.

31. The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise.

The ear that heareth (regardeth) reproofs tending to life shall abide (find its permanent home) among the wise. The word for "abide" means primarily shall lodge over night; but this is to make a residence, to find a *home*. So beautifully does this proverb commend the docility which bends the ear to listen to reproof. He who *loves* to correct his own faults and to make himself

wiser and better to-day than he was yesterday, will surely find his permanent home among the wise and good.

32. He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding.

This proverb treats of the same general truth as the preceding. "*Despiseth* his own soul," *i. e.*, shows himself no mercy; acts as if he would throw away his best good, his immortal welfare, as a worthless thing. On the other hand, to hear reproof is to "get a heart" (so the Heb.) *i. e.*, a *good* heart, intelligent, well-informed, wise.

33. The fear of the LORD *is* the instruction of wisdom; and before honor *is* humility.

The fear of the Lord (true piety) brings the instructions of true wisdom. Humility before honor is a truth full of practical good sense and of useful suggestion. He who is too wise in his own conceit to receive kindly and even thankfully the counsels and when needed the faithful reproofs of the good, need not hope to become worthy of honor. To stand low in one's own esteem is thus a first condition of standing high in the esteem of others, the wise and the good. Discreet men award honor most freely to those who seem not only worthy to receive but able to bear it.

## CHAPTER XVI.

1. The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, *is* from the LORD.

The received version fails to give the sense of the Hebrew which should read—"To man is the preparation of the heart; from the Lord is the answer of the tongue." To man pertains the disposing, the ordering of his heart; the government of his thoughts; the formation of his purposes; the shaping of his petitions in prayer; but to God pertains the answering of his requests, the successful issue of his schemes. Apparently the sentiment of the proverb may cover both the offering of prayer with its answer from the Lord, and the shaping of man's plans with their ultimate issues, which are determined through the agencies of God's providence.

2. All the ways of a man *are* clean in his own eyes; but the LORD weigheth the spirits.

"Clean," in the sense of morally pure, right. Men are prone to assume that all their own ways are right. But the Lord tries the heart, and finds the basis of his judgment there. Thought and spirit may be quite intangible to us; we may have no crucible to try them in; no scales that will weigh them; but the scales of God weigh the souls and the spirits of men.——The sentiment of the first clause has already appeared in 12: 15 and in 14: 12; the entire proverb in slightly different terms in 21: 2, and the thought mainly in 24: 12.

3. Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.

Having formed your plans in the fear of God, seek the aid of his providence in their execution; so shall they be established. The original is expressive—"*Roll your doings over* upon the Lord;" devolve upon him the ordering of all the events which are to affect you. He will make your plans *firm*, successful. See the same sentiment, Ps. 37: 5. God's providential agencies are every-where, to confirm or to confound human devisings and doings. Let no man ignore God's hand, lest God set at naught all his endeavors.

4. The LORD hath made all *things* for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.

It is doubly important to understand this proverb, (1) Because it does teach a great truth; (2) Because it does *not* teach a certain great error which has been sometimes imputed to it.——The word "made" can not be restricted to creative work, but legitimately includes all the doings of God,—works of providence more specifically than works of creation. The Lord *works* all things in the sense of shaping events and determining issues with special reference to retribution for moral good or evil done by his moral subjects.——The original word rendered "*for himself*" admits of another construction with this sense: The Lord works everything *for its own* purpose, *i. e.*, he makes results and issues correspond to the human agencies involved in them. He makes the final result of every earthly life correspond to what that life has been. This second possible construction yields a perfectly unexceptionable sense, and is moreover strongly sustained by the peculiar punctuation of the Hebrew word in which the presence of the article forbids us to read it simply "for," in the sense, "for the sake of." The sense of the proverb therefore is that simply in accordance with the great, eternal law of fitness, God brings upon the wicked the destiny of suffering. There is a just and righteous correspondence between the moral activities of his creatures and the reward which a just God will bestow therefor. This has its special manifestation as between sin and suffering; the moral evil that is wickedly, rebelliously done by his creatures, and the evil of suffering, righteously inflicted by their Supreme

King and Judge.——Unfortunately this proverb has sometimes been tortured to say that God has created the wicked for the sake of punishing them, *i. e.*, in order to secure the good results of it in his moral universe. This doctrine has been made specially objectionable by associating it with a practical denial of free moral agency—by assuming that, to accomplish his ends in creating sinners for perdition, God holds them to a life of sinning by a law of necessity which they can not break. Nothing can be wider from the truth than this, or more repugnant to every sentiment of benevolence or even of justice. We need to remember that God punishes the wicked for their voluntary rebellion against his authority—for their purposed antagonism toward all righteousness, goodness and truth. We need to distinguish broadly between God's supposed creating of sinners in order that they may sin, that so he may damn them for the good to come from it: and on the other hand, his actually creating them that they might be obedient and so be blest, and then punishing them only because they *will not* obey him, but will perversely scorn their Maker, disown his authority, abuse his love, and set at naught all his efforts to reclaim and save them. Our proverb affirms that in this sense God shapes the destiny of the wicked to their just doom of suffering. When they absolutely *will* consecrate themselves to sinning and to rebellion, the only use God can make of them is to give them their just doom of woe, and make them an example to his moral universe. The only issue that can bear a just relation of correspondence to their horribly wicked life, is this awful doom of suffering.

5. Every one *that is* proud in heart *is* an abomination to the LORD: *though* hand *join* in hand, he shall not be unpunished.

It is often repeated in various forms that God abhors the proud. See 6: 17 and 8: 13. The last clause, "hand to hand the wicked shall not be held innocent," appears in 11: 21. Prof. Stuart gives it this turn:—Though one hand be joined to the other, though the proud man put both his hands and all his power to the effort, he can never secure his own exemption from punishment. But probably the sentiment is, Though one man's hand be put to another man's hand with never so much combination of human forces, etc., etc.

6. By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD *men* depart from evil.

"Purged," in the almost obsolete sense of *cleansed* in the eye of law, atoned for, covered so as to be screened from punishment. This end is promoted by thorough reformation, the offender returning to kindness [mercy] and to truth, real uprightness. The doctrine applies to human laws and to their administration; also to the personal relations of man with man. We much more

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readily forgive those who give us proof of their penitence by radical reform. Yet we need not press the proverb to make it assert that God's system of forgiving sinners calls for nothing else but reformation. In his system true repentance is a condition of pardon, yet not the ultimate ground on which it rests.——As the first clause shows how sin once committed may be atoned for, the last clause shows how men may avoid sinning. Let a wholesome fear of God be impressed constantly upon their souls. So they will depart from sinning.

7. When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.

This general truth finds its reason in God's favoring providence, and in the fact that what pleases God will commend itself to the human conscience as right, and will therefore afford the least possible occasion for ill-will and opposition. This truth can not be taken as a universal one, for, if universal, it would make persecution for righteousness' sake impossible. The depravity of a very wicked world brings in some exceptions to the general law indicated here.

8. Better *is* a little with righteousness, than great revenues without right.

Nearly the same sentiment appears in 15: 16 and Ps. 37: 16. A very little wealth, and even few comforts, yet with righteousness, insuring peace of conscience and peace with God, is better than great incomes obtained in violation of justice. Wealth so gotten brings with it the curse of the Almighty; sooner or later the bitterest self-condemnation, and the detestation of all the good. With stinging words of terrible truth the apostle James puts this case: "Your gold and silver is cankered, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you and shall eat your flesh as it had been fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of your laborers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth, and the cries of them that have reaped have entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth" (5: 1–5).

9. A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps.

It is for man to lay his plans; the Lord only can confirm them. This rests in his good pleasure.

10. A divine sentence *is* in the lips of the king: his mouth transgresseth not in judgment.

Solomon thought of civil government as ordained of God, and of the king therefore as ruling under God, and, while standing in his proper relations toward God, as divinely guided in his decisions.——The Hebrew word rendered "divine sentence" is often

used for divination, *i. e.*, for communications supposed to come from some higher power.——"His mouth transgresseth not" [more precisely, *will not speak deceitfully*] in its judicial decisions. You may expect honesty from one who stands so near to God and who bears such responsibilities.——It need not be assumed that this proverb was intended as a history of the kings of the earth. It is rather a view of their relations to God and of their consequent responsibilities and duties. If you may assume that they are acting honestly and truly for God, then these things will be true.

11. A just weight and balance *are* the LORD'S: all the weights of the bag *are* his work.

These are the Lord's in the sense that he requires them and enjoins the fair dealing which they provide for and were intended to secure. "*His work*," seems to imply that he made them, and enjoined their use as a safeguard against the inherent human selfishness which would otherwise develop itself in fraud or injustice. See the same sentiment in 11: 1, and the Hebrew law in Lev. 19: 36.——The Hebrew word for "weights" is *stones*, suggesting the ancient usage of small stones for weights. The dealer carried them in a bag. Hence the greater facility for deceit, since he might and sometimes did carry one set of stones to buy with and another to sell with. See 20: 10 below, where this form of fraud is condemned.

12. *It is* an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness.

Obviously this first clause must be taken in the ethical and not the historical sense—as affirming what *is in itself considered* rather than what is *in the real hearts* of kings. In view of the king's relations both to the Great God and to the good of his people, nothing can be more true than this, that the doing of evil *ought* to be utterly abhorrent to his soul, a supreme abomination. The reason assigned is—"For the throne is established by righteousness," and no king has a right to break down his own throne. He ought to shudder at the bare thought of any act that must naturally sap its foundations.——It is pleasant to think that these were Solomon's own views of his royal responsibilities when he came to the throne of Israel (1 Kings 3: 5–9, and 2 Chron. 1: 8–10), and that he was taught them impressively in the last words of his venerable father: "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me and his word was in my tongue. The God of Israel said, He that ruleth over men *must be just*, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain" (2 Sam. 23: 2–5).

13. Righteous lips *are* the delight of kings; and they love him that speaketh right.

In this connection "righteous lips" are truth-speaking lips. They are the delight of kings, because it is essential in order to rule well that their sources of knowledge should be reliable, and that they should know the actual facts of every case.

14. The wrath of a king *is as* messengers of death: but a wise man will pacify it.

This assumes that the king's power is absolute—the power of life and death over his subjects. Hence his wrath is like the swift "angels of death." The same arbitrary terrible power is assumed to lie in the king in the proverbs (19: 12 and 20: 2). It appears in the history of David and Solomon (1 Kings 1: 52 and 2: 6, 8, 9). Hence, if a man is wise he will labor to pacify the king's wrath and be careful not to excite it.

15. In the light of the king's countenance *is* life; and his favor *is* as a cloud of the latter rain.

In symbol, light indicates joy and good will; the "light of the king's countenance" stands opposed to dark frowns on his brow. It therefore expresses his good will and is life to those on whom it falls. Beautifully is his favor compared to the cloud that brings the latter rain. These latter rains, falling in March and April, shortly before their harvest, and essential to its maturing well, were foretokened by this cloud of promise, which must, therefore, have been a beautiful sight to the husbandman—not a black cloud of wrath; not the precursor of hail and tempest, but of gentle showers that came to crown with blessings the approaching harvest.

16. How much better *is it* to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver!

Compare 8: 11, 19. This is rather an exclamation than a question, calling for a precise answer. In the original it is put tersely and forcibly: "To get wisdom—how good it is more than gold! And to get understanding—to be chosen more than silver!" Solomon himself, at least in his youth, was a fine illustration of this sentiment. (See 1 Kings 3: 11–13.) The sentiment is eminently wholesome both for kings and for all who bear the responsibilities of government.

17. The highway of the upright *is* to depart from evil: he that keepeth his way preserveth his soul.

Very noticeably, the way of the upright is here a *highway*, raised and made smooth and dry for perfect travel; not rough, or low and miry as in the state of nature. Such is the way of life which belongs to the upright. The thing said of it here is that it turns squarely away from evil—leads off to avoid all sin, and so, all ill. He who carefully keeps this way will preserve not merely his

strength from waste and himself from weariness, but his *soul* from the evils that imperil human souls in this world of sin.

18. Pride *goeth* before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

Pride is the natural antecedent of destruction. According to all social and moral law, destruction follows close upon foregoing pride. A haughty spirit is itself a prophecy of a speedy fall. The philosophy of this fact is not hard to find, for who does not know that a proud and haughty spirit betrays folly, forfeits esteem and love; provokes the social and moral retribution that is itself destruction and a fall? If this be true in human society and under its moral laws, how much more under the righteous retributions of Jehovah's administration!

19. Better *it is to be* of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud.

As the preceding proverb gives us the ruinous results of pride, this gives the worth of humility.——"Dividing the spoil," in a country for ages but too familiar with the ways of savage robbery and plunder as well as of war, was naturally significant of victory, booty, and exuberant joy. But better are the humble of heart who have sympathy with the lowly than they who associate with the proud even in their hours of most exultant hilarity.

20. He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good: and whoso trusteth in the LORD, happy *is* he.

"Handleth wisely," translates a Hebrew word which means simply to consider attentively, wisely, intelligently. "Matter" represents the very common Hebrew term for *word*, which may, however, bear the sense of *thing*. Hence we may choose between referring it to God's revealed word, or to things in general that are proper subjects of consideration. Probably the latter sense should be taken, the proverb commending serious, careful thought on all important subjects. Blessed are they who add to such diligent consideration a real and hearty trust in the Lord.

21. The wise in heart shall be called prudent: and the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning.

The original word forbids our taking "prudent" in the sense primarily of cautious, safe against indiscretions; and requires the sense, intelligent, discerning.——"Shall be called," according to the common Hebrew idiom, means shall really be so, and not merely, shall be so reputed and spoken of. The distinction is that between character and reputation.——"Sweetness of lips," signifies pleasant words and an agreeable manner of speaking. Such sweetness gives the teacher a special charm, and augments his teaching power so that he actually teaches not only better but more thereby.

22. Understanding *is* a well-spring of life unto him that hath it: but the instruction of fools *is* folly.

See a similar use of the figure "a fountain of life," in 13: 14 and 14: 27. Such a source of rich and permanent good is the human intelligence, the possession of a mind capable of apprehending and appreciating truth, especially the great moral truths which relate to God and duty.——In the last clause, the word for "instruction" often has the sense of correction, chastisement. So taken, it means: Their own folly is the chastisement, the scourge of fools. The proverb would then put in contrast the life-fountain of good which the one has in his intelligence and knowledge, against the source of self-scourging and torment which the other has in his folly. Thus the proverb may refer to wisdom and folly in their bearing upon their possessors. It may, however, refer to their respective influence on others. I favor the former.

23. The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips.

If the Hebrew idiom corresponded in this point to our own English, I should find in this proverb the sentiment that real benevolence, good and great-heartedness, helps the wise to teach and gives their lips augmented power of instructing others. But Solomon's usage of the word "heart" looks to intelligence rather than benevolence. Hence we must interpret this proverb: The intelligence of the wise gives them useful truth for their lips to speak and makes their words precious for the instruction of others.

24. Pleasant words *are as* a honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.

Words are made pleasant in many ways: (1.) By the charms of imagination; (2.) By their suggestive power; (3.) By their simplicity; (4.) By becoming the vehicle of sweet thoughts and pleasing emotions; (5.) By the agreeable manner of speaking them. ——The Hebrew allows here a broad range. The proverb tells us that the charm of such words is like the sweetness of honey, only that this is said to carry its sweetness both to the soul and to the body.——The wise will infer the desirableness of possessing this power of pleasant words.

25. There is a way that seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof *are* the ways of death.

See the same in 14: 12.

26. He that laboreth, laboreth for himself; for his mouth craveth it of him.

The original is in this form: "The appetite of the laboring man labors for him"—probably in the sense of energizing to press him to work for its gratification. The impulses of appetite become a

constant force toward labor—as said in the last clause, "His mouth urges this upon him." Man must work because he must eat.

27. An ungodly man diggeth up evil: and in his lips *there is* as a burning fire.

As digging a pit was one way to ensnare wild animals, it came to be used in the sense of laying snares and plotting mischief in general. The ungodly man ["man of Belial," Heb.] loved and manufactured mischief. That there was a burning fire on his lips betokens slander—malign, satanic slander—as if every word were hot shot, or a poisoned arrow for the bosom of friend or foe, almost without discrimination. Of such sin, what language, what figures of speech can over-paint its vileness!

28. A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends.

While in this collection (chap. 10–22: 16), each proverb is a complete truth of itself, and not dependent on any other, yet we often have several in succession relating to the same subject. Here we have a series upon sins of the tongue.——This declares that a man of perverseness scatters abroad strifes, sowing the seeds of discord. A tattler separates the best of friends.

29. A violent man enticeth his neighbor, and leadeth him into the way *that is* not good.

"Violence" [Heb.] contemplates assaults upon human life. (See Gen. 6: 11, 13.) In this proverb, Solomon seems to have his eye on those robbing and murdering practices referred to in chap. 1: 10–18. The "enticing" appears there as here.——The way "not good" is a way superlatively bad.

30. He shutteth his eyes to devise froward things: moving his lips he bringeth evil to pass.

This proverb seems to set forth the intense feeling with which the wicked sometimes project and prosecute their malign schemes. He shuts his eyes in order to think the harder and to plot the more deeply; he bites his lips under his burning emotions. So he accomplishes his cherished mischief.

31. The hoary head *is* a crown of glory, *if* it be found in the way of righteousness.

Solomon does not say "*if* it be found," etc., though he may perhaps imply it. Literally, I translate: "A crown of glory is the hoary head; in the way of righteousness it will be found." It is certainly supposable that the sense may be: Old age is prima facie evidence of a virtuous life. In Solomon's time, wicked men did not live out half their days; he who honored father and mother lived long upon the land God had given his people. But whether

the proverb should take this turn or not, it certainly means all that our English version expresses. It is a glory to have lived a long life, be it only a virtuous and a useful one.——Our age of the world has some hoary sinners; a sadder class of men, and one more to be pitied live not on the face of the earth! To have outlived almost every form of sensual enjoyment; to have worn out body and soul in sin; to have nothing in the past that memory can recall with pleasure, and nothing in the future that can be thought of intelligently without shuddering horror; how does the realization of such an old age agonize and appall us!

32. *He that is* slow to anger *is* better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.

Noble sentiments are these! The man who is slow to anger is greater than the hero: he who thoroughly rules himself, than he who conquers a city. Man has no capacity for power more noble than that by which he holds every passion in due self-control; no ruling is greater or better than self-ruling. Let us emulate such glory!

33. The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof *is* of the LORD.

This is obviously the *sacred lot*—a method of appealing to God for his decision. The reader may see cases of this in Lev. 16: 8–10, in the choice between the two goats on the great day of atonement; in Josh. 15–19, for the division of Canaan among the tribes; in 1 Chron. 24: 5, 7, in the assignment of special duties among the priests. It must not be inferred that this appeal to God can be properly made without special direction from himself. Such direction preceded its use in the cases referred to. It can not be well to presume upon God's interposition to express his will by the lot unless he has authorized it in the special case.

## CHAPTER XVII.

1. Better *is* a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than a house full of sacrifices *with* strife.

Essentially the same sentiment appears in 15: 17.——The word for "quietness" has the broad sense of *peace* as opposed to strife and as the fruit of love.——One class of sacrifices, the peace-offerings, were chiefly appropriated to the use of the offerer and his friends as a sort of thanksgiving feast. See the allusions to this custom in 7: 14; also in Ps. 22: 25, 26. But the word here used may have a wider application, even to slaughtered animals

in general. The Orientals esteemed flesh as the richest of food. ——But a dry crust with peace and love is better than a house full of fatlings to be eaten amid strifes and heart-aches and bitterness of soul. Think of a family quarrel over a thanksgiving feast! Who would not sooner have the driest crust with only the poorest water to moisten it? The joy of the heart is indefinitely more and better than the joy of the palate!

2. A wise servant shall have rule over a son that causeth shame, and shall have part of the inheritance among the brethren.

A "son that causeth shame" in the eye of Solomon is the indolent, thriftless son (see 10: 15), or the reckless spendthrift who wastes his father's estate and drives his mother from the ancestral home (19: 26). Fitly he puts the wise servant above such a son. It reversed the laws of Hebrew society for a servant to bear rule over the son—the ruling of the house and the rights of power under the patriarchal regime naturally descending from father to son. So also did the inheritance of the estate.——A wholesome moral lesson is here for the wayward sons in Israel, and not less so for wayward sons in all ages. Let them see to it that in point of dignity and power they fall not below even the servants or the slaves of the household.

3. The fining pot *is* for silver, and the furnace for gold: but the LORD trieth the hearts.

The skill of man finds out the agents and invents the processes for proving and purifying gold and silver: the Lord does the same thing as to human hearts. How can the dross of sin abide the ordeal of his furnace and of his fires!

4. A wicked doer giveth heed to false lips; *and* a liar giveth ear to a naughty tongue.

The sentiment of this proverb may be that bad men love to drink in and pour out slander; love to become receivers and retailers of the falsehoods that float round in vile and slanderous society. Or it may perhaps signify that wicked men are themselves deceived by their equally wicked associates, and so get a part of the penalty of their own wickedness by associating with men of like character. Either sense is true. The former would paint the vice and the ways of slander; the latter would look toward one form of retribution which God provides for under the laws of a sinning world. The latter view is unexceptionable.

5. Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker: *and* he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished.

If we may suppose that the latter clause continues and expands the sentiment of the former, then the poor are thought of as being

made so by sudden calamity. In this view of the cause of their poverty, it would be specially reproachful to their Maker to mock their sufferings, since it would virtually assume that the great Father, so far from sending upon them affliction for their higher good, had sent it only as a visitation of his wrath—only to hold them up to the scorn of mankind. What a scandal would this be upon the Infinite Father!——The men who fall under his chastising rod should surely in their day of purifying trial receive from us our prayerful sympathy and not our haughty scorn. Let us recall those words of Job [19: 21]; "Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me."

6. Children's children *are* the crown of old men; and the glory of children *are* their fathers.

Virtuous grandsons are a crown of honor to the aged; so also are worthy fathers to their children. The reflection of honor between fathers and sons is reciprocal. Each class therefore has this high and noble motive to a virtuous life; the father, that he may be a glory to his sons: sons and grandsons, that they may be a crown of honor as well as a perpetual joy to their aged father. Such sentiments have a wholesome bearing.

7. Excellent speech becometh not a fool: much less do lying lips a prince.

Choice words, a noble voice and impressive manner befit real dignity of character and well become the utterance of wisdom; but, alas! how unsuitable are they to the fool! So and much more are lying lips unfitting for the prince. Whoever bears the solemn responsibility of ruling under God should abjure all falsehood.

8. A gift *is as* a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it: whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth.

The Hebrew word used here for "gift" [שֹׁחַד] is shochad. This word appears in the Mosaic law (Ex. 23: 8 and Deut. 16: 19)—every-where a thing forbidden. A very different word (מַתָּן) mattan, appears in the proverbs (18: 16 and 19: 6) which might seem to the English reader to be analogous to this. They are not so. The "present" which Jacob sent forward to conciliate Esau (Gen. 32: 13) is indicated by still another word to which no bad sense attaches.——In this proverb therefore we can not suppose that the great influence of the bribe is adduced to recommend its use, but rather to state the fact for its admonitory lessons. It is but too true that a bribe is like a precious stone—a ruby or a diamond—in the eye of him who receives and retains it. As the stone, turn it which way you will, reflects a brilliant and beautiful light, so a bribe unconsciously dazzles the eye, and thus perverts first the clear view, and then the righteous judgment.

9. He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth *very* friends.

Manifestly the word "cover" has here not precisely its somewhat usual Hebrew sense, forgive, but the English sense of conceal, hide from view. It stands opposed to reporting a case over and over. He who thus conceals a transgression promotes the spirit of love toward the offender both in his own heart and in the hearts of others.——A similar sentiment appears in 10: 12.——Over against this, he who repeats the story of a wrong may sever the warmest friendships—may sunder the hearts of the best friends. Compare 16: 28.——But let no reader suppose that this proverb forbids *all* disclosure of others' wrong doings. It forbids our disclosing such wrong *maliciously*, or even causelessly; but by no means forbids its being done when the greater good manifestly requires it, and when therefore the law of love to all men demands it.

10. A reproof entereth more into a wise man than a hundred stripes into a fool.

The verb rendered "entereth into" may come from either of two Hebrew roots; in the one case meaning—Goes down into him more deeply; in the other, Takes hold of him more powerfully. The Masorites favor the latter. Either makes good sense. A reproof (in words only) takes more effect upon a wise man than a hundred floggings upon a fool. This I take to be the exact sense of the original.

11. An evil *man* seeketh only rebellion: therefore a cruel messenger shall be sent against him.

The rebellion thought of here is against the king and the government. Against a man radically bad whose aim is only rebellion, the king sends his sternest messengers of justice. Why should not he?

12. Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly.

This proverb evinces a keen sense of the mischiefs of folly and of the dangers of coming into contact with a fool when his folly is in full blast. Some of the commentators assume that the fool here is thought of as maddened by his angry and revengeful passions—which is at least probable.

13. Whoso rewardeth evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house.

"Returning evil for good" is such an outrage upon all righteousness and even upon common morality that God will take the case in hand and punish the man who does it not only in his own

person but in his children after him, onward and onward indefinitely. The sentence, "Evil shall not depart from his house," dooms his offspring to an inheritance of calamity.

14. The beginning of strife *is as* when one letteth out water: therefore leave off contention, before it be meddled with.

A dam, embankment, dike, or levee, raised to confine the waters of a river or of the ocean in their bed, afford this very apposite illustration of the dangers attendant upon the beginnings of contention. As a pin-hole—the slightest leak in the earth-bank—rapidly wears itself to a perilous size, and the mighty torrent can be stayed by no human power, so a slight disagreement—one sharp word—one angry retort—may fire up fierce passion to fearful madness. Therefore leave off that strife before it gets under headway—rolling itself violently along—the precise sense of the original.

15. He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both *are* abomination to the LORD.

As God's glorious nature and his infinitely just administration hold him to condemn the wicked and to justify the righteous, he must instinctively abhor those who seek to reverse his policy and frustrate his aims of justice. Why should not he both abhor them with the utmost ardor of his holy soul, and withstand them with the full energy of his almighty arm?

16. Wherefore *is there* a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing *he hath* no heart *to it?*

The fool with no heart to buy wisdom is not the idiot; is not even the half-idiotic, as some of the commentators assume. "Heart" in such a connection is not synonymous with intellect. The quality which this fool hath not is far more that of his moral nature than of his intellectual. So I must think, my views being determined both by such usage as I find in Prov. 7: 7 and 9: 4 and 10: 13—passages which treat of the lack of heart as this does—and partly by the nature and right of the case. It would be utterly foreign to the genius of this book of proverbs for the writer to deplore the waste of money and means for the purchase of wisdom because so many of the race were *semi*-idiotic! No; it is not for the lack of brains but for the lack of a morally right heart that such multitudes never pay out the money God has put into their hands for the genuine article, heavenly wisdom. This fact may well be for a lamentation and a marvel!

17. A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

The love of a true friend is constant through all the changes of time and circumstance. A true brother is born to you for your aid in the day of adversity. You will need and may rely on him then.

18. A man void of understanding striketh hands, *and* becometh surety in the presence of his friend.

The author has previously given his views of suretyship for others' debts. (See 6: 1–5 and 11: 15.) In saying that a man void of understanding will do this he means to hint that *no other man will*—none but he who lacks discretion and good sense.

19. He loveth transgression that loveth strife: *and* he that exalteth his gate seeketh destruction.

To love strife is practically to love the sin to which it leads and which inevitably ensues from it.——Building the gates of one's palace very high evinces pride, provokes envy, and precipitates ruin. As a very high gate is dangerously exposed to a sudden and crashing fall, so the pride which it represents works in a thousand ways to bring down destruction. To connect the last clause with the first, we have only to consider that such manifestations of pride naturally provoke contention and hence also the sin and ruin which ensue.——That men of rank in the oriental world sought distinction by building their gate high, appears in the epithet given to the monarch of Turkey—"The Sublime Porte"—the man of high gate [*sublimis porta*].

20. He that hath a froward heart findeth no good: and he that hath a perverse tongue falleth into mischief.

"Findeth no good" is one mode of saying, finds any thing else but good; finds evil in abundance.——A froward heart and a perverse tongue are essential equivalents. Both are ruinous.

21. He that begetteth a fool *doeth it* to his sorrow: and the father of a fool hath no joy.

"Fool" is here, as usual, in the moral rather than the intellectual sense. The father of such a son can have only sorrow, no real joy, from him.

22. A merry heart doeth good *like* a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.

See similar sentiments in 12: 25 and 15: 13, 15. "Merry" is joyful. Joy of soul acts on the body like a medicine.

23. A wicked *man* taketh a gift out of the bosom to pervert the ways of judgment.

Here as in verse 8 above, "gift" is the Hebrew word for bribe and is used in this sense. It is only the wicked man who makes use of a bribe to pervert the course of justice by corrupting the

judge. He takes it out of his bosom where he has had it concealed. The thing is done very covertly. Of course Solomon condemns this.

24. Wisdom *is* before him that hath understanding: but the eyes of a fool *are* in the ends of the earth.

The wisdom of wise men is at hand, ready for use, always *before him*, under his eye: but over against this, the eyes of the fool see none of the present facts of his condition—overlook the very things he needs to see in order to judge well and to act discreetly. What eyes he has are in the ends of the earth, occupied upon things utterly remote and valueless.

25. A foolish son *is* a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him.

The same sentiment appears in verse 21, and elsewhere.

26. Also to punish the just *is* not good, *nor* to strike princes for equity.

To punish the just is not good, but very bad. So also to smite princes for doing right—literally, *on account of righteousness*, which of course means, because they are righteous. All this reverses the great law of equity.

27. He that hath knowledge spareth his words: *and* a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit.

In the clause, "of an excellent spirit," the English margin ["a cool spirit"] follows the Hebrew text in preference to the Hebrew marginal reading, and is the preferable one, the sense then being: He who is of *cool* spirit, under self-control, of passions not easily excited. I prefer to transpose both clauses and render thus: He who spareth his words evinces good sense [valuable knowledge], and the man of cool, self-governed spirit is the man of understanding. The author of these proverbs accounts much talk *prima facie* proof of a shallow mind; and on the other hand, a prudent reserve in speech a proof of good sense and a fair intelligence.

28. Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: *and* he that shutteth his lips *is esteemed* a man of understanding.

This proverb follows out the thought of the next preceding, and confirms the general doctrine taught there. Even a fool, if he had the sense to hold his peace, might have some reputation for wisdom. So strong are the convictions of mankind to the point that much talk goes with little thought, and that reserve in speech often signifies more than average thinking.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

1. Through desire, a man, having separated himself, seeketh *and* intermeddleth with all wisdom.

On this proverb the views of commentators have been not only various but extremely diverse. A few take it in a good sense; most, however, in a bad. What kind of a man the translators of our English version found described here, it would be hard to say.——"He who separateth himself" [בַּדָּד] may be the recluse who withdraws from all society; or, more probably, the self-conceited, haughty man who cuts the acquaintance of the wise and repels all advice or suggestion toward a better life.——The first thing affirmed of him is that he intensely seeks self-gratification; literally the phrase is—"seeketh ardently for desire," *i. e.*, to gratify his own desires.——The next thing said of him is that he rushes onward against all good counsel. The pivot word is the one which our version translates "intermeddleth" [יִתְגַּלָּע]. Gesenius translates it, becomes angry or warm in strife; but Fuerst, a more recent critic, gives it—*moves violently forward*, rolls himself along, reckless and headlong. The other cases of its use are in Prov. 17: 14, and 20: 3, where the sense last named is very pertinent. "Leave off contention before it gets under furious headway;" "It is an honor to a man to cease from strife; but every fool will dash headlong," *i. e.*, will do the very opposite of ceasing from strife.——The etymological grounds of this meaning as they appear in Fuerst's Lexicon can not well be presented to the English reader, but he can readily see that the resulting significance is unexceptionably pertinent in all these passages.

2. A fool hath no delight in understanding, but that his heart may discover itself.

"Discover," as usual in our Bibles, not in the sense of finding out for himself, but of revealing to others.——Literally the last clause would read—"a fool hath no delight in understanding, but if his heart may disclose itself," *i. e.*, if this can be done, he likes it; he loves to bring out all he thinks, all he is. He has not sense enough to see that he makes himself ridiculous; but thinks his very follies are smart, etc.

3. When the wicked cometh, *then* cometh also contempt, and with ignominy reproach.

Where the wicked come, disgrace will come, *i. e.*, will follow them inseparably; and with disgraceful conduct will come disgrace itself. The reputation will follow the deed and the wicked man will go on accumulating disgrace, reproach.

4. The words of a man's mouth *are as* deep waters, *and* the wellspring of wisdom *as* a flowing brook.

"The words of a man's mouth"—but not of *every* man's mouth—for the last clause shows that he thinks only of the wise man. His words are as deep waters, a deep, capacious reservoir, not easily, if ever, exhausted. His words have a savor of good sense which impress you as coming from a deep fountain of thought and wisdom.

5. *It is* not good to accept the person of the wicked, to overthrow the righteous in judgment.

To "accept the person" (literally, to receive the *face*) is to regard the merely external circumstances, as opposed to regarding the essential right and equity of the case. It includes all forms of personal favoritism, whether on the ground of sympathy with the character, or of relationship, or the influence of bribes. It was expressly and stringently forbidden in the Mosaic law (Lev. 19: 15 and Deut. 1: 17 and 16: 17). See also Prov. 24: 23. ——This proverb may be construed in two ways. (1.) It is not good to accept the person of the wicked; nor is it good to frustrate the righteous in his effort for a just judgment; or, (2.) It is not good to respect the person of the wicked for the purpose and with the result of frustrating the righteous in judgment. The latter is preferable because it simply translates the text.——Such regard to persons to the extent of overthrowing the righteous in judgment must always be a flagrant sin before God, not only because he hates all injustice, but especially because this form of injustice frustrates the very provisions God has made for securing justice to those who are both innocent, and powerless to assert and maintain it. Civil government is God's own institution, ordained for this very end, to secure justice to those who need the aid of government for this purpose. To balk these kind designs of the Great Father by corrupting his own earthly tribunals of justice must, therefore, be an aggravated, heinous offense against God—an utter abomination in his sight. Let corrupt rulers think of it! Shall they set themselves to frustrate the kind designs of the Great God and then think to escape his wrath!

6. A fool's lips enter into contention, and his mouth calleth for strokes.

A fool's lips enter [readily, naturally] into contention. The words of his mouth provoke violence; they are such words as call for blows. Reason: they are ill-tempered, rash, offensive, irritating, and, withal, are void of discretion.

7. A fool's mouth *is* his destruction, and his lips *are* the snare of his soul.

This proverb is a corollary, an inference from the preceding one. His rash words become his destruction. His lips are a snare to his very life.

8. The words of the tale-bearer *are* as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.

The word for "wounds" occurs only here and in the same proverb repeated (26: 22). Hence it has been interpreted variously. Fuerst gives it, "oracular" as the words of an oracle, which were spoken in whispers, or in low muttering tones, yet took hold powerfully of men's minds, and in this sense went down into the soul to be deeply pondered. So of the words of the slanderer. They have entirely too much influence; take hold too strongly of the listener's mind. The analogies which this critic finds between this and kindred roots seem to favor this meaning strongly. But Gesenius, Maurer, and others, following an Arabic analogy, give the word the sense of sweet-meats, dainty morsels, such as men swallow greedily. This resulting sense is eminently simple and pertinent, which is its strongest recommendation.——The English version, "wounds," is not sustained by any modern critic.

9. He also that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster.

As bearing upon the accumulation of wealth and the comforts of life, there is little to choose between the slack hand and the wasteful one. They are near enough alike to be brothers. The difference between not getting and wasting is of small account.—— The Hebrew phrase for "great waster" is expressive—"master of wasting"—as if he had the art to perfection.

10. The name of the LORD *is* a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.

All the names of God being significant of his attributes, expressing some of the various qualities of his being and character, the phrase, "the name of the Lord," differs not materially from the word *Lord* only. Perhaps it originally implied that the name was used with a proper appreciation of what it meant. In this proverb the meaning is simply that the Lord himself is a strong tower. The figure is military. Towers, built high, were a very effective protection against the missile weapons of ancient warfare. The Hebrew word for "is safe" means is up on high, and therefore out of the reach of darts, javelins, or the sling-stones of war.——We may suppose that Solomon had read those beautiful words by his father —"The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and *my high tower*" (Ps. 18: 2). So we may also suppose that Peter had both Solomon and David in his eye when (1 Pet. 1: 5) he spake of Christians as "*kept*" (his was a military word) by the power of God through faith unto salvation."

11. The rich man's wealth *is* his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit.

This proverb seems to be located here to show the contrast between this and the preceding. As the righteous man makes the name of the Lord his strong tower, so the rich man regards his wealth as his strong city and high wall. It is so, the proverb adds, not in fact but in his own conceit. He so regards it. Alas, that he should so commonly esteem this "strong city" above that "high tower;" should disown and discard the mighty God, and make his riches the object of his supreme trust! (See 10: 15.)

12. Before destruction the heart of man is haughty; and before honor *is* humility.

This sentiment appears in 16: 18 and in 15: 33. Haughtiness of heart is followed swiftly by destruction, and by the same law of sequence, honor follows true humility.

13. He that answereth a matter before he heareth *it*, it *is* folly and shame unto him.

The sense seems to be, Before he has heard it *thoroughly*, heard the whole of it and given it due attention. This case is strongly put by saying, "Answers it while yet he has not heard it." This can never be to a man's credit, but only to his shame.

14. The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?

"Infirmity" is thought of here as that of the body. A resolute, strong heart can bear up against physical pain; but when the heart itself is broken down, who can bear it? What remains to bear up under such suffering?——This proverb rightly assumes the absolute superiority of mind over matter, as tested by their relative power to endure suffering. The mind rises nobly above the ills of the body; but what can the body do toward lifting man above the ills of a crushed spirit?

15. The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge.

The gist of this proverb I take to be that the heart of the discerning ["prudent"] acquires knowledge readily, because his ear is always earnestly open to catch all words of wisdom. He appropriates all the valuable truth that comes within his reach, and puts himself in the best attitude for reaching it.——Remarkably in the proverb (15: 14), we have [in Hebrew] the same description of the wise man as here in the first clause, and the same things affirmed of him as here in the second.

16. A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men.

The "gift" here is not the bribe [as in 17: 8], but any thing *given*, a present offered according to oriental custom. According

to the ancient usages of society, such a present opened the way for the giver and conducted him into the presence of great men. The proverb should be regarded rather as stating the fact than as commending the practice, although the practice does not seem to be condemned.

17. *He that is* first in his own cause *seemeth* just; but his neighbor cometh and searcheth him.

You hear the first man state his case; he seems to have right on his side; but when his neighbor comes in to reply, and to give his side of the case, he searches out his opponent, canvasses the facts, and often puts a new face upon the whole matter. The moral is, therefore, hear the other side before you judge.

18. The lot causeth contentions to cease, and parteth between the mighty.

The appeal to the lot to decide a contested question seems to have been common in the age of Solomon. When the parties agreed to submit their case to such an appeal, it put an end to the contest and parted the mightiest combatants asunder.

19. A brother offended *is harder to be won* than a strong city; and *their* contentions *are* like the bars of a castle.

One remarkable thing in this proverb is that so much is left to be supplied. The Hebrew would read literally, "A brother alienated [*i. e.*, in love and confidence] is *more than* a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a castle;" which, with our English translators, I take to mean—is a more stubborn thing to subdue than a strong city, and their contentions are strong like the bars of a castle. Quarrels between children of the same father and mother are most difficult of all to appease.

20. A man's belly shall be satisfied with the fruit of his mouth; *and* with the increase of his lips shall he be filled.

Words spoken will bring their proper retribution. There is an *income* from them—a result of good or ill according to what they are. As the fruit and income from hand labor goes to supply the demands of the digestive organs and of the animal frame, so the lips also have their income, *i. e.*, a just retribution. See kindred sentiments in 12: 14 and 13: 2.

21. Death and life *are* in the power of the tongue; and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.

As absolute monarchs have the power of life and death over their subjects, so has the tongue a life-and-death-power as to its possessor. Its too free use, especially its malicious use, may cost him death; its wise and discreet use will be his life. They who love its too free indulgence must eat the fruit thereof—a suggestive

warning!——In an age when all human governments outside of Israel were absolute, all kings arbitrary, all courts suspicious, and all utterances on political matters were under a rigid espionage, proverbs like this would have a pertinence and a practical bearing which we but feebly apprehend.

22. *Whoso* findeth a wife findeth a good *thing*, and obtaineth favor of the LORD.

The author manifestly recognizes marriage as a divine institution and naturally a fountain of blessing. Hence a wife is a good—a blessing from the Lord. (See 19: 14.) It is remarkable that nearly the same words are used here of the wife as are said of wisdom in 8: 3, 5: "Whoso findeth me" (saith Wisdom) "findeth life and shall obtain favor from the Lord."——Some of the critics marvel that Solomon did not discriminate enough to say, "findeth a *good* wife," since they are sure he must have meant this and this only. It is indeed marvelous that if he meant to say *this only*, he did not say it just as he meant it. It seems to me safe to conclude that he meant to indorse marriage as a divine institution and a source of blessings to the husband whose concern it is to find a wife. Let him always regard a wife found as a favor obtained from the Lord. Some degree of mutual adaptation to each other in age and character are essential to the very purposes of married life and may therefore be considered as necessarily implied in the idea of a wife.

23. The poor useth entreaties; but the rich answereth roughly.

The poor speak imploringly. Conscious of weakness they appeal to your compassion. But the rich man will answer with harsh or even contemptuous words. He feels very independent, and is perhaps irritable under the pressure of his cares; so he repels you with a hard and haughty bearing—of all which the world is full of living illustrations.——But let it not be supposed that this stands here commended to any man's imitation.

24. A man *that hath* friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend *that* sticketh closer than a brother.

This difficult proverb has of course been interpreted variously. All the modern critics concede that the English version is inadmissible, if we retain the Hebrew text with its present punctuation. Our translators erroneously assumed that the word for "friend," and the verb "Show thyself friendly," were from the same root.——The obscurity of the proverb is probably due in part to the paranomasia between these two words—*i. e.*, a play upon the similarity in their letters, consequently in their sound, while their sense is quite unlike. It is somewhat as if we should say in our tongue—A man of [too many] companions will be companionized; or rather (for the sense) *victimized*. This is the

sense of the first clause.——Comparing the first clause with the second, the original uses a very different word for "friend" where the English has the same. The first ("he that hath *friends*") may be a bonny companion, a hale fellow, a very free associate to live upon you, to eat up at once your time, your morals, and your estate; but the second ("there is a *friend*") is the *loving* friend who is bound to you by ties of pure and strong affection. He will cleave to you more than a brother. The sentiment seems to be that too many loose associates will work your ruin; but one truly affectionate friend is worth more than a brother.

## CHAPTER XIX.

1. Better *is* the poor that walketh in his integrity, than *he that is* perverse in his lips, and is a fool.

The man described in the last clause ["perverse in his lips," etc.] is probably assumed to be *rich* as well as perverse of lips and a fool; inasmuch as the proverb (28: 6), nearly identical with this in other respects, substitutes "rich" for "fool." Without riches this man would have nothing to recommend him. It would be very tame to compare a poor but upright man with one who was both liar and fool, and say, that is better than this.

2. Also, *that* the soul *be* without knowledge, *it is* not good; and he that hasteth with *his* feet sinneth.

Knowledge, in the first clause, opposed to hasting with the feet in the second, implies the practical use of knowledge, *i. e.*, discretion, forethought, wisdom. It is not good that the soul be void of such knowledge.——The word for "sinneth" means etymologically to miss the mark; to make a misstep and get a fall—the natural consequence of too much haste with the feet.

3. The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the LORD.

I take the course of thought to be this; a man's folly perverts his heart; his perverse heart perverts his outward life ["way"], making it rough, calamitous, wretched. Then he frets against the Lord as if *He* had brought on these evils—which however are really the natural fruit of his own sins, or at least *may* be. Of this human life is full of illustrations.

4. Wealth maketh many friends; but the poor is separated from his neighbor.

"Friend" here, not in the sense of the loving one who sticks closer than a brother (18: 24), but in the sense of companions, associates, who hang about you to get good from you rather than to do good to you. Many such are drawn round the rich man: all such keep aloof from the poor. The same Hebrew word is rendered "friend" in the first clause and "neighbor" in the second. The same sort of friend therefore who hangs about the rich man finds no attraction in the poor. Indeed he feels a positive repulsion; he may have some unwelcome draft or call upon him to aid such a friend in his extreme need.——See this sentiment in other proverbs, 14: 20 and 19: 7.

5. A false witness shall not be unpunished; and *he that* speaketh lies shall not escape.

See v. 9 below.——False witness, especially in the solemn form of judicial testimony, God will surely punish. All liars shall have their part in the burning lake. (Rev. 21: 8.)

6. Many will entreat the favor of the prince: and every man *is* a friend to him that giveth gifts.

"Gifts" here are not precisely bribes but presents, after the prevalent oriental usage. This is the same sort of friend as in v. 4 above, and also in the first clause of 18: 24.——This proverb affirms a general fact in society, but does not commend it as an example.

7. All the brethren of the poor do hate him: how much more do his friends go far from him? he pursueth *them with* words, *yet* they *are* wanting *to him.*

See 14: 20 and the notes there.——This poor man seems to be one who has seen better days but has by some means become poor. Then even his brothers turn from him *as if* they hated him; how much more do his former associates stand aloof—that loose sort of friends who seem true in the sunny days, but show themselves false in the foul.——The last clause is difficult. The most obvious construction of the Hebrew would make "words" the direct object of the verb, thus: "He pursues words, but they are not;" which may mean that he earnestly follows up those words of kindness and implied promise which they had given him freely in his prosperous days; he appeals to these friends to fulfill those pledges of friendship, and, by implication, of material help, but finds to his bitter disappointment that they *are not;* there is nothing of them; they fail him altogether and forever. Chasing after such "words" is only a double aggravation to his poverty.

8. He that getteth wisdom loveth his own soul: he that keepeth understanding shall find good.

The Hebrew use of the common word for "heart" is noticeable here: "He who acquireth a *heart* loveth his own soul." This

must be a wise and understanding heart, one that welcomes moral truth and loves to obey it in the form of duty.——He who "keeps understanding," in the sense of duly observing its moral claims, *it shall inure to his finding good;* for this is the form of statement in the original.——As to the mode of expression in the first clause, compare 8: 36. "He that sinneth against me [wisdom] wrongeth his own soul: all that hate me love death"—in the same sense in which the wise man "loves his own soul" in the verse before us.

9. A false witness shall not be unpunished, and *he that* speaketh lies shall perish.

See verse 5 above. This sentiment is reiterated with extraordinary frequency and fullness in these proverbs.

10. Delight is not seemly for a fool; much less for a servant to have rule over princes.

The word rendered "delight" means delicacies, luxuries; usually those of the table, yet perhaps not excluding those of dress, equipage, etc. These are unbecoming for the fool.—— Similar views as to servants having rule over princes appear in Prov. 30: 21, 22, and in Eccl. 10: 5–7. Solomon assumes their utter unfitness for the station and for its responsibilities.——The doctrine of this proverb corresponds with Solomon's own example, for no king of his time had ever associated royalty with external splendor and luxury to a greater extent than he.

11. The discretion of a man deferreth his anger: and *it is* his glory to pass over a transgression.

The thoroughly wise man will be long-suffering, slow to anger, keeping his passions under vigorous self-control. It is his glory to overlook and forgive offenses.

12. The king's wrath *is* as the roaring of a lion; but his favor is as dew upon the grass.

Similar sentiments appear in 16: 14, 15, and in 20: 2.——Absolute power appears in this comparison of the king of men with the king of beasts.——"Dew upon the grass" was in oriental life a pertinent and forcible symbol of whatever was most cheering and refreshing.

13. A foolish son *is* the calamity of his father: and the contentions of a wife *are* a continual dropping.

The long-continued fall of only single drops of water, upon the head for example, becomes in no long time unendurable and even fatal to life. When the power of reaction is exhausted, the agony becomes fearful. So the contentions of a wife, in your home, where you look for rest and for love, and feel that you can not

live without, are of the same unendurable sort.——Whether Solomon had only heard of such agony by the ear, or seen it at a distance from his own hearthstone, or whether he had felt it, we have no means of certain knowledge.

14. House and riches *are* the inheritance of fathers: and a prudent wife *is* from the LORD.

"Prudent" is here in the sense of wise, intelligent to apprehend the responsibilities of her position, and true to her duty. While houses and lands come down from fathers to sons, such a wife comes from the Lord. He provides this choicest of social blessings for the good of the race through well-ordered families. Those who believe this and have faith in God's universal providence will of course see the fitness of asking such a blessing from the Lord, and, when received, of recognizing it through all their life as a gift from his hand.

15. Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger.

See similar views of sloth in 6: 9–11. Sloth and excessive sleep are closely associated. Solomon abhors sloth; holds that it brings men to want, and that it *ought* to.

16. He that keepeth the commandment keepeth his own soul; *but* he that despiseth his ways shall die.

We may notice here a play upon the word "keepeth," bringing out its two different senses. He who *keepeth* God's commands in the sense of holding them carefully in mind and constantly obeying them, *keepeth* his own soul from sin and from its consequent ruin and death. Obeying God's commands is the very opposite of sinning, and therefore saves one from the loss of his soul.—— But over against this, "he who despiseth his ways" in the sense of being reckless of his own moral conduct, thoughtless and even contemptuously regardless of his obligations to God and to man, must fall under the curse of God. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die."

17. He that hath pity upon the poor, lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.

It is assumed here that this pity of the poor does not expend itself in mere emotion, but yields the genuine fruits of substantial help according to our ability and their need. He who gives to the poor in the spirit of such true pity virtually lends to the Lord upon the Lord's promise to repay in his own due and best time. The Hebrew has it—His recompense the Lord will make good to him.——What an investment this must be! Do we believe in the plighted word of the Most High? Have we confidence in his resources to pay and in his wisdom to make the

payment in the best possible time and manner? If so, then here is an opportunity for investing which ought to be regarded as amply secure and eminently satisfactory.

18. Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying.

In the first clause the original words more often and more naturally mean "*for* there is hope," than "*while* there is," etc.—— In the last clause, if we accept the Hebrew text as it stands, we must reject the received translation—"Let not thy soul spare for his crying." The primary and proper sense of the Hebrew word is, "And thou shalt not lift up thy soul to *cause his death.*" This last verb which I have translated—"To cause his death," seems to admit no other sense. No word in the language has a more certain meaning. [מוּת]. The other Hebrew words are used somewhat frequently and in a well-established sense, *e. g.*, the verb [נָשָׂא]; the noun [נֶפֶשׁ]; and the preposition [אֶל]. This usage may be seen in Deut. 24: 15—the laborer, lifting up his soul to his wages, *i. e.*, setting his heart upon them; Hos. 4: 8—the wicked lifting up their soul to the iniquities of God's people, *i. e.*, setting their heart upon them; Jer. 22: 27, said of the exile with reference to his fatherland, "To the land whereunto they lift up their soul to return; and Ps. 25: 1, "To the Lord do I lift up my soul, etc.; and Ps. 24: 4, the good man has not "lifted up his soul to vanity." These cases unite in the one idea of *setting the heart upon an object of desire.* But it will be asked: How can we suppose that a father deems it an object of desire to take the life of his son?——I can give no other explanation of the passage than to take it as a caution against the excitement of sudden passion, kindled, perhaps, to exasperation by insult or violent resistance. Let the father beware that he do not abuse his absolute power!

The translators of the English version apparently assumed anōther root [הָמָה] for their rendering—"his crying." But if our Hebrew text is correct, this derivation is grammatically impossible.——See other proverbs on this subject (23: 13, 14) which seem to have had an influence on our translators in their version of this passage.

19. A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment: for if thou deliver *him,* yet thou must do it again.

The man of great wrath, *i. e.*, greatly given to violent passion, must suffer punishment, for though you might deliver him once, his passion will plunge him into violence again, so that you may as well despair of shielding him permanently.

20. Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end.

Keep thine ear open to the counsels of wisdom so that, if not wise now, thou mayest become so in thy future years and may die a wise man.

21. *There are* many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand.

The word for "devices" is most often used in the bad sense. Men have many such, and the proverb implies that they are wont to fail. The plans of men are often abortive; the plans of God, never.

22. The desire of a man *is* his kindness: and a poor man *is* better than a liar.

The charm ["desire"] of a man in humble life is his kindness; the poor is better than a man who is in high life, but is a liar. ——In this translation I have given their special shades of meaning to the two different words for "*man*," which occur here in the Hebrew; the first [אָדָם] meaning man as frail, low, in humble life; and the second [אִישׁ] man as noble, in high life, and, probably, rich. I do not find this speciality of meaning in this proverb alluded to in any commentator, but since it is an admitted Hebrew usage and gives more point to this proverb, I do not hesitate to suggest it. (See this special usage Ps. 62: 9, and 69: 3, and Isa. 2: 9 and 5: 15.)——The proverb looks apparently to the value of these two men as related to the afflictions and wants of their suffering neighbors. The charm of the poor man's kind words and spirit (he having nothing else to give) is worth more than the fairest promises of the rich man who fails to perform them with ample means to do so.

23. The fear of the LORD *tendeth* to life: and *he that hath it* shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil.

The fear of the Lord [true piety] is *unto life;* not only tends toward life, but surely works out this result. He shall pass the whole night satisfied—a beautiful way of saying that his peace of soul shall be constant. The visitations of judgment on the wicked shall not touch him.

24. A slothful *man* hideth his hand in *his* bosom, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again.

Not "bosom," but "*dish*," the common receptacle for the food upon the table. The orientals made use of no knife, fork, or spoon; only fingers. Hence such allusions as that in Matt. 26: 23: "He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish," and hence the special propriety of washing hands both before dinner and after. ——This sluggard is supposed to be hungry; but having plunged his hand all over [hiding it] in the dish, as if to economize labor to the utmost, he still finds himself too lazy to bring it back to his

mouth again! This is strongly put, purposely to make the sluggard appear ridiculous, revolting. Too lazy to eat!

25. Smite a scorner, and the simple will beware: and reprove one that hath understanding, *and* he will understand knowledge.

The simple is here not in the bad sense of one easily seduced into sin, but in the good sense of being open to good impressions.—— If you smite a scorner [corporeally], though you may fail to do him good, yet the simple will profit by the example. Reproof alone will suffice for those who are truly discerning. They will grow wiser thereby.

26. He that wasteth *his* father, *and* chaseth away *his* mother, *is* a son that causeth shame, and bringeth reproach.

He who wasteth his father's estate by his prodigal life and drives his mother from her home, either by abuse or by sacrificing and wasting the very home itself, is truly a son who brings disgrace on himself, not to say, on the whole family.

27. Cease, my son, to hear the instruction *that causeth* to err from the words of knowledge.

Never listen, my son, to any counsel that would influence you to turn aside from the words of knowledge to go into ways of error, folly, and shame.

28. An ungodly witness scorneth judgment: and the mouth of the wicked devoureth iniquity.

"A witness of Belial," at heart a bad man, scorns justice; has not the least regard to it. The mouth of the wicked swallows down iniquity greedily as one who loves it. See the same figure in Job 15: 16: "Man who drinketh in iniquity like water."

29. Judgments are prepared for scorners, and stripes for the back of fools.

Penalties and the scourge are for those whom no counsel can reach to reclaim. The man who repels all good advice, scorning the good friends who seek to save him, and even the Great Father above—what else remains, befitting his case, but judgments? If these fail to save him, he is past being saved. The example of his punishment will be wholesome to society, wholesome to the moral universe.——Fools and scorners in the sense of the proverb are of the same class; indeed, we may say these are only different names for the same sinner. The proverb may be taken to mean not only that such punishments await them, but that such and nothing less or other, are the law of the moral universe, and the only righteous policy.

## CHAPTER XX.

1. Wine *is* a mocker, strong drink *is* raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.

What is called "strong drink" [שֵׁכָר] was made, according to various ancient authorities, from wheat, from barley, dates, and other fruits, or from honey, and was sometimes mixed with spices to make it more intoxicating. It seems not to have been called by our translators "strong" relatively to wine, but to other common drinks. Like wine it was intoxicating.——The thing affirmed here is that wine robs a man of his sense of propriety and makes him abusive and insulting to others. Strong drink makes him boisterous, noisy, sometimes raging like a madman. Whoever reels, staggers, under their intoxicating power, will not become wise [this verb being future]. The use of either wine or strong drink will shut off all hope of attaining true wisdom. For this acquisition, a calm, self-poised, considerate state of mind is indispensable. The maddening power of strong drink is fatal.—— "Deceived" seems not to be the precise sense of the original word [שָׁגָה]. This verb always means to waver, wander, to miss one's mark, to reel, etc.

2. The fear of a king *is* as the roaring of a lion: *whoso* provoketh him to anger sinneth *against* his own soul.

The fear which the king inspires is like that produced by the roaring of the lion. He who irritates the king by himself becoming excited, overbearing, abusive, makes a fatal mistake, makes a miss that will reach his very life. The Hebrew words seem to involve these ideas. Compare 19: 12 and 16: 14.

3. *It is* an honor for a man to cease from strife: but every fool will be meddling.

"Meddling" is far short of the full sense, which is, Will rush on violently and madly in strife, rolling himself over and over, plunging on headlong. The same verb occurs in this strong sense, 17: 14 and 18: 1.

4. The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold: *therefore* shall he beg in harvest, and *have* nothing.

In the climate of Palestine plowing and seed-sowing are late in autumn and in early winter. Hence the sluggard would excuse himself because of the cold. In the harvest-time he will beg for bread and get none.

5. Counsel in the heart of man *is like* deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out.

The wisdom that yields useful counsel is deep in the heart like the waters of a well. The discerning man will see it there and will have the skill to draw it out.

6. Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness; but a faithful man who can find?

Almost every man will publish and parade his own goodness; but the man of faithfulness—true to his professions—is hard to find.

7. The just *man* walketh in his integrity: his children *are* blessed after him.

This proverb may be connected with the preceding as a sort of answer to its closing question. The just man habitually walks in his integrity, with consequent blessings not upon himself alone but upon his children as well.

8. A king that sitteth in the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes.

See v. 26. This is what a wise and faithful king *should* do. His very look should discriminate the wicked from the good and drive away wickedness as a winnowing wind does chaff.

9. Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin.

This must be explained to mean: Who can say this appropriately and truthfully, and perhaps with some emphasis on the word *I* as opposed to what God and his grace do for those who seek help of him. I see no reason to suppose that Solomon meant to deny what John (1 Eps. 5: 4) affirms, viz., that "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." He seems rather to speak of those who boastfully proclaim what they themselves have done.

10. Divers weights, *and* divers measures, both of them *are* alike abomination to the LORD.

"Weights and measures" relate to commerce, being the instruments used to determine quantities. The thing which God abhors is not the having of two or more, but having them unequal, some larger, some smaller; one set to buy with, and another to sell with. See v. 23 below, and Deut. 25: 13–16.

11. Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work *be* pure, and whether *it be* right.

By his doings the mere child will show not only what he is now but what he will become in after life. Hence the importance of studying his developments of character closely at the earliest possible period, that you may forecast his future and guard in season against evils which, neglected, will become incurable.

12. The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the LORD hath made even both of them.

That God made the ear and the eye is affirmed for the sake of this inference, viz., that he must therefore himself have a perfect ear and eye to discern all human deeds and even thoughts. (See Ps. 94: 9.) "He that planted the ear, shall not *he* hear? He that formed the eye, shall not *he* see?"

13. Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty: open thine eyes, *and* thou shalt be satisfied with bread.

The thing disapproved here is the sleep of the sluggard as in 6: 9 and 19: 15, and not the taking of sleep for wholesome, needful rest.

14. *It is* naught, *it is* naught, saith the buyer: but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth.

Thus the arts of trade and the spirit of the sharper were the same in the age of Solomon as in our own. Human selfishness makes no progress (morally) in the ways of business, with the lapse of ages.

15. There is gold, and a multitude of rubies: but the lips of knowledge *are* a precious jewel.

A forcible and elegant way of saying that lips of knowledge are precious and beautiful even as gold or rubies.

16. Take his garment that is surety *for* a stranger: and take a pledge of him for a strange woman.

Taking raiment for a pledge was by the Mosaic law put under special limitations (Ex. 22: 26, 27), yet in this extreme and very questionable case, those limitations seem to be disregarded. Take for a pledge even the clothing of a man who is so reckless as to become surety for a foreigner, and if you have business transactions with that foreigner, bind *him*—this Israelite, and take his responsibility, not the foreigner's. Yet (as said in the first clause), take not his word for security, but take real property, for though his word may be better than the foreigner's, you do well not to trust any thing but his garment.——In this last clause if we follow the Hebrew text and not the Hebrew margin the noun for foreigner ["strange"] is masculine plural and not feminine singular; *i. e.*, it does not speak of the "strange woman," but of foreign men. Foreigners, as to the Jews, were aliens and heathen with whom, according to the divine law, they were to have as little intercourse as possible.——Nearly the same appears in 27: 13.

17. Bread of deceit *is* sweet to a man; but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel.

The bread obtained by deceit [fraud] may be very sweet at first; the after part will be as if his mouth were filled with gravel. So universally, though the first taste of sinful enjoyment may be sweet, it will be bitterness in the latter end.

18. *Every* purpose is established by counsel: and with good advice make war.

Even the best of plans need wisdom to carry them into effect; and making war should be managed with the utmost caution and good judgment—the best policy of all being to let it alone!

19. He that goeth about *as* a tale-bearer revealeth secrets: therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips.

All the best modern critics make the last clause essentially parallel with the first by giving the word rendered "flattereth" the sense of *openeth*. Be not intimate with him who *carries his mouth open*—who never closes his lips to keep any thing he knows, but divulges every thing. This seems to be the well established sense of the verb.——With the first clause, compare 11: 13.

20. Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness.

By a figure at once truly beautiful and terribly forcible, this flagrant sin against one's father and mother is threatened with the most appalling punishment. That the lamp of one's life—the only means for one ray of light and joy—shall be extinguished in the very depths of darkness, leaves this miserable victim the wreck of ruin and despair. God will never lack the requisite agencies to punish this most unnatural sin.

21. An inheritance *may be* gotten hastily at the beginning; but the end thereof shall not be blessed.

We have two diverse readings in the case of the verb translated, "gotten hastily," the Hebrew text giving the sense, An inheritance *cursed* in the beginning will not be blessed in the end; but the Hebrew margin, followed by the English version and by many able commentators, means, *gotten with haste*, with the implication of injustice in the means of its acquisition. The former, because it is the reading of the text, has the higher authority. Of course it assumes that this inheritance is cursed *for good cause*, *i. e.*, because gotten by fraud or violence. Hence the two constructions are essentially one in thought.

22. Say not thou, I will recompense evil; *but* wait on the LORD, and he shall save thee.

"Recompense evil" I take to be requiting evil for evil done; doing evil to others for the evil you suppose them to have done to

you. The proverb entreats you not to say, I will do this, not even in your most secret thought; but rather to wait on the Lord, committing your cause to him under his promise that he will save you. This is fully in harmony with the doctrine of the Scriptures elsewhere; *e. g.*, Deut. 32: 35, "To me belongeth vengeance and recompense"—a declaration which Paul uses with great force, (Rom. 12: 19)—"Recompense to no man evil for evil. Revenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath, for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." Also, Prov. 24: 29, and the doctrine of the sermon on the mount (Matt. 5: 39, 44).——If this precept were obeyed by half the living world, these obedient ones would have little violence to fear from the other half; there would be a vast diminution in the wrongs inflicted by man upon his fellows. Those who thus committed all vengeance to God would have a most precious experience of his friendship and love; would find their hearts drawn exceedingly near to him as to an ever-present Friend and Preserver, and would have a double joy in the victory gained over one of the most dangerous passions of the depraved heart.

23. Divers weights *are* an abomination unto the LORD; and a false balance *is* not good.

Here, as in v. 10, the original for "divers weights," is "a stone and a stone"—two or more of different weight, to be used for fraud in trade. A deceitful balance *not good*, means one utterly bad; not even one good element in it.

24. Man's goings *are* of the LORD; how can a man then understand his own way?

The question here lies between two possible constructions: (1.) How can a man know what he should do and ought to do? (2.) How can he foreknow the circumstances under which he must act, and hence, what he will do and its consequences? The former is the question of moral duty considered as determined by man's free choice; the latter is simply the question of the future, considered as determined by the providence of God—the force of circumstances and events. Plainly the latter and not the former accords with the line of thought here. Since the future is in this sense determined by the Lord, how can he, frail man, foreknow it and its results? The Hebrew avails itself of its choice of terms for *man*. The goings of even the mighty man [גֶּבֶר] are controlled of God; how then can man, weak and of short vision [אָדָם] know what his own way is to be?

25. *It is* a snare to the man *who* devoureth *that which is* holy, and after vows to make inquiry.

The word rendered "devour" means rather to vow rashly to regard something as holy—to consecrate any thing to a holy use

without reflection. The sentiment is that a man is ensnared by making a vow thus without reflection, and postponing till after his vow the inquiry whether he can perform it, or whether it is admissible to disregard it. (See Eccl. 5: 4, 5.)

26. A wise king scattereth the wicked, and bringeth the wheel over them.

Solomon had previously spoken (v. 8) of kings as winnowing out the wicked as chaff is separated from the grain. Probably that figure of the chaff suggested this, borrowed from threshing—the wheel of the heavy threshing wain or sledge, drawn by cattle and driven over the grain, a vivid image of the crushing down of the wicked under the penalties of violated law. History records some cases in which this threshing wain was literally dragged over human flesh. (See 2 Sam. 12: 3, and 1 Chron. 20: 3, and Amos 1: 3.) But as the winnowing in this proverb is a figure, so probably is the "wheel."

27. The spirit of man *is* the candle of the LORD, searching all the inward parts of the belly.

The soul of man, considered as having the power of turning its searching eye inward and taking cognizance of its own moral states and acts, is here beautifully compared to the lamp of the Lord, going down into the secret chambers of the inner man to search out the dark things there. The conception of the chambers of the soul as within the belly is quite oriental and not occidental at all. We must not judge their tastes fastidiously, and yet we need not adopt them.——Let us see in this reflexive power one of the noblest features of man's God-like nature. He can and may know himself, and therefore may prosecute the noble work of self-correction and self-culture. To know one's faults or weaknesses is the first step toward correcting them. A being made capable of self-improvement must inevitably have before him a momentous destiny. Given an eternity in which to prosecute this work, who can estimate the height to which he may rise? Or if he neglect all effort for self-improvement and give himself up to self-murder, who can conceive how low he may sink?

28. Mercy and truth preserve the king: and his throne is upholden by mercy.

These qualities of heart and principles of regal administration afford him the best security for his person and the most solid support for his throne, for the twofold reason that they will best insure to him the love and good-will of his subjects, and also the favor and blessing of the great God.

29. The glory of young men *is* their strength: and the beauty of old men *is* the gray head.

The last clause should doubtless be qualified as in 16: 31:

The hoary head is a crown of glory *if* found in the way of righteousness.

30. The blueness of a wound cleanseth away evil: so *do* stripes the inward part of the belly.

Stripes that make deep wounds are the remedy for the wicked Such smitings go down deep into the chambers of the soul. The Hebrew gives no hint of the idea of "blueness." The general sentiment is as above—that a vigorous corporeal punishment is an effective remedy for the wicked man or boy, because it goes deep into his sensibilities—takes hold, when, by the supposition, nothing else will. Closely in this connection, Solomon had spoken of the "spirit of man" as "the candle of the Lord," going down deep into the soul; but remembering that some men do their utmost to extinguish this candle, and *will* not be searched deeply by its light, he intimates that God's fearful discipline, in the form of corporeal infliction, must be his next and last resort.

## CHAPTER XXI.

1. The king's heart *is* in the hand of the LORD, *as* the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.

The "rivers of water" referred to here are the little rills turned aside from the main stream for the purposes of irrigation. As the farmer conducts the water along the hillsides in an artificial watercourse, and then takes out the lesser streams at whatever point he will to irrigate his lands, so God turns the hearts of kings with infinite facility to whatever purposes he will. Moses alludes to irrigation in Egypt (Deut. 11: 10) as a land where "thou sowedst thy seed and *wateredst it with thy foot* as a garden of herbs." Vast reservoirs of water having first been filled from the Nile, the husbandman cut his aqueducts, let in the water, and then, as he passed along, opened an outlet or closed it *with his foot*, with the greatest ease. Especially was this done with ease *compared with any other known method of irrigation;* and to this the figure in our proverb may tacitly refer.——So God can turn the mighty influence of kings into channels of beneficence, along which he can make it pour blessings all abroad at his own good pleasure. So he used Cyrus, the Persian king, for blessings upon his captive children in Babylon. So he makes even the wrath of kings praise himself. If he can shape the mighty issues of the counsels of kings with infinite ease, and even their very counsels themselves, how much more all the purposes and works of men of lesser power!

2. Every way of a man *is* right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts.

See 16: 2 for a parallel proverb; the same sentiment in the same or synonymous words.

3. To do justice and judgment *is* more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.

This great moral truth, eminently important to be reiterated under a dispensation in which sacrifices were so prominent, we actually find repeated often in the ancient scriptures. (See 1 Sam. 15: 22, 23, and Ps. 50; 8 and 51; 16, 17, and Isa. 1: 11—15, and Hos. 6: 6, and Mic. 6: 7, 8).

4. A high look, and a proud heart, *and* the plowing of the wicked *is* sin.

An high look and a proud heart (literally, lofty eyes and swelling of heart) are repulsive to God, because they are the manifestations of a spirit that disowns his supreme authority and disregards the law of love to man. See a similar expression in Ps. 101: 5.—— The uniform usage of the word "plowing" [נר] compels us to give it the sense of *lamp* or *light*, used figuratively to denote whatever the wicked most delight in and count most vital to their happiness. Since they are in rebellion against God, their lamp or light is precisely that which most sustains them in this rebellion, which constitutes their chief joy and chief reward in the ways of sin. Light is a common, not to say universal, symbol of prosperity and joy. That which is the source or fountain of such prosperity to the wicked is the thing here referred to. It feeds their pride, fosters their high looks; therefore this, along with their high looks and proud heart, goes to constitute their sin.——In a moral and practical point of view, it is a great, not to say fatal, objection to the English version that the plowing of the wicked is, of all their doings, least associated with high looks and a proud heart. Who would ever think of classing it with lofty eyes and a haughty bearing?

5. The thoughts of the diligent *tend* only to plenteousness; but of every one *that is* hasty only to want.

"Thoughts" (as usual in this Hebrew word) has the sense of plans, arrangements for business. The active and diligent are here put in contrast with the rash and headlong whose schemes are never well considered. Or perhaps we may better follow the course of thought, frequent in these proverbs, which associates haste in getting rich, not so much with ill-digested plans of labor as with violations of the moral law, fraud, theft, or robbery. (See Prov. 20: 21 and 28: 20.)

6. The getting of treasures by a lying tongue *is* a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death.

This somewhat difficult proverb I prefer to construe thus: Treasures gotten by a lying tongue are as the driven breath of those who are [practically] death-seekers. Treasures gotten, rather than the getting of treasures. A driven breath is a breath driven as if before the whirlwinds of the Almighty. It is the breath of those who by virtue of their wickedness are seeking their own death. Alas, these treasures, so vain, so transient, so fraught with death! Procuring death, *i. e.*, bringing upon their possessor the ruin he righteously deserves. Such treasures, considered with reference to the enjoyment they afford, are a breath dispelled suddenly; but considered with reference to the terrible retribution they bring, they seek and demand the destruction of their lying possessor.——The first word may very naturally mean not precisely the *getting* of such treasures but the treasures themselves so gotten. This construction being admitted, the rest is natural and exceedingly pertinent.

7. The robbery of the wicked shall destroy them; because they refuse to do judgment.

The violence of the wicked (which they use upon others) snatches, sweeps them away to their destruction, because they refuse to do justice. Deliberately discarding justice, and deliberately resorting to violence, God's righteous retribution gives violence its commission to sweep them away to their doom.

8. The way of man *is* froward and strange: but *as for* the pure, his work *is* right.

This proverb presents rather stubborn difficulties, yet they are so involved in the etymology of the Hebrew word translated "strange" that the case can not be easily presented before the merely English reader. Our received version can not be right; the first clause is too indefinite. It seems to say that the ways of all men are froward—which is not true: indeed, an important exception is made in the next words of this proverb.——The choice lies between these two constructions: (a) Very perverse is the way of the guilty man [the man *laden with guilt*]; but as to the upright, his work is pure. (b) The man of perverse way, even he is apostate [*i. e.*, from God]; but as to the upright, etc.

9. *It is* better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house.

To live in a small corner on the turret of a house, though badly exposed to sun, wind, and storms, is better than to live with a quarrelsome woman and have the whole house to yourselves. See essentially the same sentiment in v. 19, below. The original indicates nothing in respect to the size of the house. The idea

is that with the whole house between you, you will still be more uncomfortable than in the most narrow and exposed quarters, yet alone.

10. The soul of the wicked desireth evil: his neighbor findeth no favor in his eyes.

The very soul of the wicked man is insatiably greedy for mischief. Hence his friend finds no compassion in his eyes; his eagerness for mischief, his propensity toward wrong, will shut out from his heart all compassion for even a friend. A strong statement; but human depravity sometimes comes fully up to it.

11. When the scorner is punished, the simple is made wise: and when the wise is instructed, he receiveth knowledge.

See 19: 25 for the same sentiment.

12. The righteous *man* wisely considereth the house of the wicked: *but God* overthroweth the wicked for *their* wickedness.

There can scarcely be a doubt that the great agent in both clauses of this proverb is God, the just one. He studies closely and knows perfectly the house of the wicked: he, too, plunges the wicked headlong into ruin. He marks the growth of the wicked man's family and estate; sees how he prospers in his ungodliness; but when God has borne with him as long as wisdom and justice can sustain or even endure, then he hurls this hopelessly incorrigible sinner swiftly down to perdition.

13. Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard.

This is righteous retribution. He who will not hear the cry of the afflicted in their distress shall be brought to cry himself for help, but have no answer. As said by the Apostle James (2: 13), "He shall have judgment without mercy who hath showed no mercy." Our Lord taught the same truth most forcibly (Matt. 18: 23–35).

14. A gift in secret pacifieth anger: and a reward in the bosom, strong wrath.

It seems to be assumed that gifts conveyed secretly are thereby made more effective to appease excited passion—which is in harmony with the laws of human nature.

15. *It is* joy to the just to do judgment: but destruction *shall be* to the workers of iniquity.

Just men find their happiness in doing justice. The workers of iniquity find in their work not happiness, but destruction.

16. The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead.

The man who wanders [morally, sinfully] out of the way of wisdom, shall find his home, his place of permanent abode, among the lost [in Heb. the shades, the spirits of the wicked dead]. Compare 9: 18: "But he knoweth not that the dead [the shades] are there, and that her guests are in the depths of hell."

17. He that loveth pleasure *shall be* a poor man: he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich.

Giving himself up to sensual enjoyment, he will consume as fast as he earns, and even faster if he can, and so will accumulate nothing. Besides this, such sensuality of life steals a man's health and vigor away and makes him prematurely old and feeble. See v. 20, below.

18. The wicked *shall be* a ransom for the righteous, and the transgressor for the upright.

That the wicked become themselves the price of redemption for the righteous seems to assume that they have sought (maliciously) to involve the righteous in suffering, but under God's righteous retribution are made to bear the same suffering themselves while the righteous go free. This sort of substitution is implied in the last clause, the transgressor coming into the place of the upright. See also 11: 8.——Cases in illustration of this principle would often occur under the despotic governments of the east, where wicked men would accuse the righteous before the king, but, the truth coming to light, they would themselves be made to bear the punishment they had maliciously sought to bring upon the innocent. See the case of Mordecai and Haman.

19. *It is* better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman.

See v. 9. The idea is that no society at all is better than such. It is sad to think how often human depravity converts God's richest blessing into a positive curse.

20. *There is* treasure to be desired, and oil in the dwelling of the wise: but a foolish man spendeth it up.

The wise lay up for future use, and therefore have on hand, but fools lay aside nothing; but forthwith consume all. Solomon labors to encourage not only industry but a wise provision for the future.

21. He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life, righteousness, and honor.

"Following after" is here in the sense of carefully and earnestly aiming to *practice*—to reach as an attainment in his own life-

experience. He who labors to *be* just and kind to all will find life [true blessedness], righteousness in the sense probably of all prosperity, and true honor. I assume a slight play upon the two-fold sense of the word "righteousness;" first, upright conduct; second, its results in blessings upon the upright doer. He who follows righteousness in the former sense will find it in the latter.

22. A wise *man* scaleth the city of the mighty, and casteth down the strength of the confidence thereof.

Wisdom is power, even in war—even in the assault and capture of fortified cities—a work which would seem specially to call for pure physical force. The same point is put strongly in Eccl. 9: 13-16, 18.——"Casting down the strength of the confidence thereof"—*i. e.*, the citadel within, the point of greatest military strength, in which men chiefly confide.

23. Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue, keepeth his soul from troubles.

Compare 13: 3 and 12: 13. So large a part of the mischiefs of life comes from abuse of the tongue that Solomon guarantees exemption from most of the ills of society to him who discreetly governs that unruly member. The Apostle James states the case with about equal strength (Jam. 3: 2).

24. Proud *and* haughty scorner *is* his name, who dealeth in proud wrath.

The last clause bears the strong sense—Who conducts himself with overbearing scorn. You can scarcely give him too bad a name. He is intrinsically and intensely vile and hateful.

25. The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labor.

The strength of his propensity to sloth will prove his death, for his hands will not work. The doctrine seems to be that he ought to starve, and in the course of nature and of society he must. Paul taught a similar doctrine (2 Thess. 3: 10), "That if any would not work, neither should he eat."

26. He coveteth greedily all the day long: but the righteous giveth and spareth not.

This seems to be a continuation of the preceding. All the day long his hunger and want press; his appetite craves; but the implication is, find no supply. But the righteous have enough and to spare.

27. The sacrifice of the wicked *is* abomination: how much more *when* he bringeth it with a wicked mind?

See 15: 8. The sacrifice brought by the wicked is always abominable to God, because a true heart is never in it. How much

more when he brings it with a specially crafty purpose? *e. g.*, to buy an indulgence to sin—as if he could bribe the infinitely pure and holy God!

28. A false witness shall perish: but the man that heareth speaketh constantly.

The point of this proverb lies in assuming that the hearing witness testifies only to what he personally knows, and that consequently he always commands confidence. His mouth will never be stopped [forcibly].——Over against this, the false witness shall perish, bringing ruin upon himself.

29. A wicked man hardeneth his face: but *as for* the upright, he directeth his way.

Both the wicked and the upright employ themselves in giving firmness and solidity—the wicked man to his face; the upright man to his steps. A hard, tough, brazen face is the finished work of the former; a firm, sure, well directed moral life is the fruit of his labor to the latter. The point of the proverb lies in the play upon the different uses of the hardening process—to put on the air of impudence in the one case; to give moral stability to one's life in the other.

30. *There is* no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD.

Human wisdom, knowledge, counsel, avail nothing *for a position before the Lord.* This phrase corresponds very closely to the Hebrew, leaving as that does a slight ambiguity in the sense, whether it means (1) in his view; or (2) considered as arrayed against him; or (3) as being compared with his. The first is morally inadmissible. If we take the second as the leading idea it involves the third, a construction which I accept.

31. The horse *is* prepared against the day of battle: but safety *is* of the LORD.

Up to the age of Solomon, the Hebrews knew nothing of any use for the horse except for war. They had known them trained for the day of battle; for nothing else. But this proverb declares that salvation even in battle comes from the Lord and not from the war-horse—a sentiment eminently adapted to the case of the Hebrew people, who had no cavalry of their own, but who sometimes had to face those powerful animals in the hosts of their foes.

## CHAPTER XXII.

1. *A good* name *is* rather to be chosen than great riches, *and* loving favor rather than silver and gold.

A good name means a reputation for integrity and virtue. By "loving favor" I understand the affectionate good will of mankind. Both this and a good name are a possession earned by a good life and awarded by the friends secured to the good by such a life. In this point of view they are compared with the possession of gold.——The moral influence of such a proverb as this upon the character of the young, if carefully remembered and diligently regarded, can not fail to be wholesome and elevating. Think of it, young man—a richer treasure than the gold of the mine, and none of you are too poor to get it!

2. The rich and poor meet together: the LORD *is* the maker of them all.

The course of providence in this world mingles the rich and the poor together every-where. Therefore, since they are destined to live in each other's society here, let each remember that the same God is the one Maker and Lord of both classes, and will protect each and all in their respective rights. For he hath made of one blood all the nations and the peoples; the high and the low, the rich and the poor together. This consideration should minister both to the respect due from the poor to the rich, and to the sympathy and kindness due from the rich to the poor.

3. A prudent *man* foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished.

The sense of the word rendered "prudent" is wary, forethoughtful, sagacious—the very qualities of mind which foresee impending evils. The "simple" here are the credulous, the men who are open to all temptations. "Passing on" is less strong than the Hebrew, which means they *pass over*—in this case, the line of prudence. Of course they meet their reward.

4. By humility *and* the fear of the LORD *are* riches, and honor, and life.

The original might be rendered at once more precisely and more clearly thus: The rewards of humility, the fear of the Lord, are riches, honor, and life.

5. Thorns *and* snares *are* in the way of the froward: he that doth keep his soul shall be far from them.

This kind of "thorns and snares" manifestly imperil, not so much the feet physically as the soul morally, for the righteous man avoids them by keeping his soul with all diligence.

6. Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

The word for "train up" means to educate; to confirm in a given course; to devote or dedicate to a special service, as a house or temple is dedicated.——The translation, "in the way he should go," is what we call somewhat *free*, departing considerably from the literal form of the original, yet not perhaps from its true sense. The original would naturally read, *after the manner of his way; i. e.*, train him with reference to his future way, in a manner corresponding to what his future is to be; which certainly may mean—to what you wish it to be; to what it ought to be. All that Solomon said, however, is precisely this: "Train him after the manner of his way." The Hebrew student will see the usage of the pivot words in Gen. 43: 7, "We told him *according to the tenor* of these words;" and Exod. 34; 27, "*After the tenor* of those words have I made a covenant," etc.; and Lev. 27: 18, "Shall reckon to him the money *according to the years* that remain," etc. Probably Solomon meant, shape the young twig as you would have the future tree; give your child a culture for the after-life which you wish him to live. So doing, he will not depart from it in his old age.——Some of the critics give this construction: "Train him according to the bent of his tastes, or of his genius." Within certain limits, this may be wise philosophically; but it is not in harmony with the drift of Solomon's teachings in this book. The current of his exhortation here is thoroughly *moral*, looking directly to the great moral ends and responsibilities of human life.

7. The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower *is* servant to the lender.

The second clause gives a clew to the meaning of the first, showing in what sense the rich have power over the poor, and wherein the poor are dependent upon the rich. Solomon labors continually to encourage such industry and frugality as will lift the poor above an abject dependence upon others.

8. He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity: and the rod of his anger shall fail.

On the last clause critics differ. The choice lies between these constructions, viz.: (1) The rod which he passionately inflicts on others shall fall powerless; come to an end; or (2) The rod for his insolence [to scourge it] is made ready. The radical idea of the verb is to *make full, complete*. Hence the two shades of meaning given above are both legitimate—to be used up so that nothing remains; and, to be fully prepared for its work. I incline to the latter construction. Either would give a true sentiment; the latter is most forcible.

9. He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor.

A "bountiful eye" is literally a *good* eye, in the sense of an eye *to pity:* an eye that sees suffering and want, and indicates a heart and a hand of generous benevolence. God will bless such an eye.

10. Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out: yea, strife and reproach shall cease.

The scorner is reckless of the feelings and rights of others, and consequently has no qualities of heart that restrain him from contentions and quarrels. The proverb says that if such men would be off, contention would go too, and society would have a sabbath of rest from strife and from reproachful words.

11. He that loveth pureness of heart, *for* the grace of his lips the king *shall be* his friend.

The English version seems to assume that he who loves purity of heart will have the gift of agreeable speech, graceful eloquence; and that for the latter quality, the king will be his friend. Another construction, approved by some critics, supposes that the man has both purity of heart and graceful expression, and that for both these qualities, rather than for the latter only, the king will be his friend; thus: "He who loves purity of heart and whose lips are graceful, the king will be his friend." I like this construction.

12. The eyes of the LORD preserve knowledge: and he overthroweth the words of the transgressor.

The word for "knowledge" here must mean the wise and intelligent, the sense being that the eyes of the Lord watch kindly over them and shield them from harm, while he overthrows the words and frustrates the schemes of the perfidious, and of course brings them to ruin.

13. The slothful *man* saith, *There is* a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets.

Not that he has seen the lion or heard him; but he wishes he could—any thing to excuse himself from work!

14. The mouth of strange women *is* a deep pit: he that is abhorred of the LORD shall fall therein.

"Strange" is primarily in the sense of *foreign*, and as to the Jews practically, a woman lost to virtue, whose words were fearfully seductive to sin. Such words ensnare men to destruction like a deep pit from which none who fall into it can ever escape. The figure refers to the deep pits prepared to catch ferocious wild beasts. Those whom God no longer hopes to reclaim, but in his righteous indignation is ready to destroy, will fall therein.——

Does not this imply that God has no means of destruction for the incorrigibly wicked more sure than this?

15. Foolishness *is* bound in the heart of a child; *but* the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.

"Foolishness," not in the sense of ignorance, much less of semi-idiocy, but of wickedness, evil passions, vicious ways. "Bound up" must mean, deep-rooted, cherished and loved; interlaced with his impulses and habits so as to become almost a second nature. Yet even in this toughest case the rod of correction has a marvelous expelling power.

16. He that oppresseth the poor to increase his *riches, and* he that giveth to the rich, *shall* surely *come* to want.

This man is supposed to pursue two methods of enriching himself; he robs the poor; he gives to the rich; but in both cases he will only impoverish himself. His two methods, viewed superficially, may seem to be of opposite character and incongruous; but they both have the same end in view, and both alike will fail of the end he seeks, and will really bring him not riches but ruin.

17. Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart unto my knowledge.

18. For *it is* a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee; they shall withal be fitted in thy lips.

19. That thy trust may be in the LORD, I have made known to thee this day, even to thee.

20. Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge,

21. That I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee?

With v. 17 commences a third part of this Book of Proverbs, distinct in some points of style and method from those which precede or which follow. See the Introduction. This part closes with chap. 24.

The writer invites most diligent attention to the words of wisdom which he has to speak.——"Shall be fitted in thy lips" (v. 18) means shall be confirmed or established upon thy lips, to be always (as we might say) at thy tongue's end, fresh in memory and ever at hand, not only for reflective thought but for ready utterance; words in season fitly spoken. I have taught thee these great truths in order that thou mayest fully trust the Lord.——In the Hebrew word for "excellent things" (v. 20) the English version follows the Hebrew margin. The Hebrew text (of higher authority and making equally good sense) should be preferred, its significance being—"Have I not *previously* written thee in wise

counsels and knowledge that I might make thee know the certainty," etc. His object was to establish the great principles of wisdom and truth in the reader's mind.——The allusion in the words, "them that send thee," seems to be to those who might intrust to thee any important business or resposibility. Compare 10: 26.

22. Rob not the poor, because he *is* poor: neither oppress the afflicted in the gate:
23. For the LORD will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them.

Never take advantage of the poor, assuming that they can not defend themselves and retaliate upon you; neither oppress the afflicted [and defenseless] "in the gate," where civil tribunals were anciently held, for the Lord will plead the cause of those who have no other friend. Hence their Redeemer is mighty [23: 10, 11].——"Spoil the soul," etc., means that he can overmatch the cunning and overbearing spirit of the mightiest oppressors, even to the ruin of their souls. The Hebrew verb carries this sense.——It is a fearful thing for proud, heartless oppressors of the poor to bring themselves into collision with the Infinite God—the never-failing Redeemer and Benefactor of the otherwise helpless, friendless ones of his great family!

24. Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go;
25. Lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul.

With men given to passion have no intimacies, nay more, go not with them at all, lest thou catch their spirit, be drawn into their ways and become ensnared at the cost of life.

26. Be not thou *one* of them that strike hands, *or* of them that are sureties for debts.
27. If thou hast nothing to pay, why should he take away thy bed from under thee?

This admonition has occurred already (6: 1–5 and 11: 15). The doctrine of suretyship as it appears in this Book of Proverbs should be studied and judged of in the light of the age of Solomon and of the Mosaic system. From Moses to Solomon, the Jews had never been a commercial people. For obvious reasons it was manifestly the divine policy to prevent them from becoming such. Their system of agriculture, with no costly implements, required but little capital. Hence while they kept aloof from traffic, they had but the least possible occasion to loan money on the guaranty of another. Most of those who sought such aid were doubtless foreigners, coming or living among them for trade. During Solomon's reign, commerce received a vigorous impulse. We must

suppose the country filled with foreign tradesmen. Many Hebrews too were seeking to amass a fortune speedily in this pursuit. Hence Solomon saw the necessity of giving line upon line of warning against suretyship. ——The laws [or usage] to enforce the payment of debts were stringent, as our passage indicates.——By the laws of Moses, the poor man's outer garment, if taken in pledge, must not be kept over night, because it was his bed-covering.

28. Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set.

See the Hebrew law, Deut. 19: 14 and 27: 17. Also Prov. 23: 10.——Offenses committed with ease and detected with difficulty must be punished rigorously. But since the best of human laws are very imperfect as means of preventing such offenses, the utmost possible moral force should be brought to bear to sustain them. We see this wisdom manifested here. The "*old* landmark" should be honored as a relic of the venerable past. The *fathers* put it there: let no sacrilegious hand touch it!

29. Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean *men*.

Seest thou a man [the Hebrew word gives us the higher style of a man, not the lower] diligent, *i. e.*, prompt, active, expeditious in his work; he will make himself a standing before kings [they need such men]: he will not have his place among obscure [in Heb. dark, unknown] men. Such men as Joseph and Daniel work themselves up to high responsibilities by dint of their "diligence in business." They bring to their service capacity, energy, industry, application. Doing every thing they attempt in the best manner possible, they soon come before kings because they are wanted.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

1. When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what *is* before thee:

2. And put a knife to thy throat, if thou *be* a man given to appetite.

3. Be not desirous of his dainties: for they *are* deceitful meat.

The nicer shades of thought in this passage turn on the question whether the writer would guard men merely against overeating, or also and especially against degrading themselves in the

presence of the king; also, whether the king, in the case supposed, spread his table luxuriously for the sake of mere politeness, of friendship, or from royal custom; or rather for the special purpose of putting to the test the self-control and thereby the intrinsic stamina of his guest. I accept the latter alternative in each of these general questions. Solomon had seen enough of kings and courts to know that they had their own way of testing a man's character and habits, and the power of his appetites over him; and he gives the world at large these hints bearing on that point.——"Consider diligently" not so much *what* as "*who* is before thee." Solomon does not exhort us to look sharply into the dishes to see what we should like, nor even to judge what we ought wisely to avoid, but rather to consider thoughtfully where we are, in whose presence we are sitting, and how much may depend on the impression we may make upon his mind by our manner and bearing at his luxurious table. "Restrain thy appetite if thou be a man given to indulgence in good eating, even though it may require stern self-control, compared to a knife at the throat. Let not thy appetite be excited by the presence of his tempting dishes, for they are "deceitful meat," they are set before thee not in pure friendship but as a sharp test of thy proneness to sensual indulgence and of thy power of self-control.——Another sinister motive which the king may be supposed to have in feasting you might be to get from you some secret which it were wise and well for you to keep. Take care, therefore, lest you be thrown off your guard or rendered unfit for discreet judgment. Think of those luxuries as "deceitful meat."——Let it be suggested that self-control is always *manly* (as opposed to beastly), and that we always sit at table in the presence of the *Great King!*

4. Labor not to be rich; cease from thine own wisdom.
5. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for *riches* certainly makes themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.

An admonition against making riches the chief end of one's labor.——"Cease from thine own wisdom" should be construed as bearing on the subject in hand, and hence must mean, Cease to depend on thine own sagacity, shrewdness, skill in making money. Solomon assumes that the supreme pursuit of wealth is sure to fail of its object. This is the main doctrine of the Book of Ecclesiastes.——Wilt thou let thine eyes *fly upon* riches? *i. e.*, turn eagerly, with longing look as if to rush with outspread wings upon them? But they *are not;* they will not be there; they vanish from your view; they suddenly elude your grasp and your hand is upon nothing; for they take wings like an eagle and are away! See similar sentiments in Paul to Timothy (1 Tim. 6: 9, 10) and below, 28: 20—a lesson which men of the world are sadly slow to learn.

6. Eat thou not the bread of *him that hath* an evil eye, neither desire thou his dainty meats:

7. For as he thinketh in his heart, so *is* he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart *is* not with thee.

8. The morsel *which* thou hast eaten shalt thou vomit up, and lose thy sweet words.

The sentiment here is somewhat analogous to that in vs. 1–3 above. In that passage, however, the ruler is your host: in this, any man of malign and sinister purpose. This is the meaning of the "evil eye," a man whose aim is selfish and even malicious. He must be judged of, not by what he says but by what he thinks—his "heart" (v. 7). "His heart is not with thee," in sympathy and in friendship. If you eat his dainties you will find to your shame and chagrin that he has meanly and maliciously sought mischief against you, and you would be glad to vomit up every morsel you ate at his table. You will "lose his sweet words" of gracious but deceitful invitation, as if you were to vomit them up!

9. Speak not in the ears of a fool: for he will despise the wisdom of thy words.

Cast not thy pearls before swine! So the fool has no sense of the worth of wisdom.

10. Remove not the old landmark; and enter not into the field of the fatherless:

11. For their Redeemer *is* mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee.

Encroach not upon the lands of the fatherless [the orphan]. for they have a mighty Redeemer in the *Great God*—always the Father of all fatherless ones; the most formidable antagonist you *can* have. Stir not up his wrath, for he will plead and avenge their cause with thee.——The original sense of the word *redeemer* appears here—one who stands in law-phrase as "next friend," according to ancient usage the nearest blood relative; but in general, one who acts the part of a father for his son, or if there be no father, of a brother for a deceased brother's widow and children. It was held to be the duty of this "next friend" to assume the case and defend the rights of his protege, to be as a guardian to his ward, to avenge his blood if slain, to protect his estate if in any way encroached upon or endangered.——This doctrine should be a terror to all who would oppress the fatherless or the widow.

12. Apply thine heart unto instruction, and thine ears to the words of knowledge.

This exhortation is good for all readers and hearers, in all times and circumstances, but probably stands here with a somewhat

special reference to the admonitions which immediately follow (23: 13–24: 22).

13. Withhold not correction from the child: for *if* thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die.

14. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell.

The views of Solomon in respect to corporeal suffering inflicted for the discipline of the young are given in slightly varying phrase yet with somewhat frequent repetition. See 13: 24 and 19: 18 and 22: 15 and 29: 15, 17. The points made here are—Let not parental tenderness withhold the rod (when milder measures fail); thou hast no need to fear that under proper correction he will die; far otherwise; for if thou shalt use the rod judiciously, thou shalt rather save his soul from the death eternal.——On the question which the critics will raise here, whether "hell" [Sheol] (v. 14) means the under-world in the sense merely of the place for all the dead indiscriminately, or in the sense of the abode and doom of the wicked, the true view seems to me to be this: The death of the body when thought of as a special visitation of divine judgment upon the wicked, was deemed a pledge and precursor of the eternal death of woe beyond. In this class I would put the case of Korah and his company (Num. 16: 29–33), of which Moses said; "If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men, then the Lord hath not sent me. But if the Lord make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth and swallow them up with all that appertain unto them and they go down quick" [living] "into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the Lord."——Also in the same class, Ps. 9: 16, 17 and Prov. 14: 32. The passage before us is of the same sort. The primary sense is not—Thou shalt save him from ever dying a natural death; but thou shalt save him from dying under the judgment of God for his sins—that is, from the sudden, awful death which in that age God often visited upon the incorrigibly wicked—upon specially aggravated sins also, *e. g.*, contempt of parents. Now since such a death under the wrath of God carried with it eternal death also, the sense clearly must be, Thou shalt save his soul from the death eternal.

15. My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine.

16. Yea, my reins shall rejoice, when thy lips speak right things.

Beautiful outgushings of a father's heart are these! How deep are the fountains of his joy over a truly wise son! How does his very heart exult when a son's lips speak uprightly, according to truth and righteousness! We must assume that this father speaks of his *own* son!

17. Let not thine heart envy sinners; but *be thou* in the fear of the LORD all the day long.
18. For surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off.

Be not envious toward sinners who seem to be prosperous, but abide thou permanently in thy piety—the "fear of the Lord," comprehending piety in all its relations, involving here especially the elements of faith and trust.——"An end" (v. 18) fails to give the full idea, which is: There shall be an *after-part*, correlated to the present, which shall *even up* the rewards of human deeds according to justice. This involves complete reward to the righteous. The same word occurs in this sense (24: 14, 20) where our English version properly has it "*reward.*" (See also Jer. 29: 11 and 31: 17.) In most of these cases it is significantly connected with the word "expectation"—ground of hope for the righteous. The Lord therefore would say to his dutiful children, Be not troubled by the present prosperity of the wicked; the righteous will surely have their reward in due time; if not wholly in this world, yet without fail in the world to come. Your expectation of due reward can by no means fail in the end.

19. Hear thou, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way.
20. Be not among wine-bibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh:
21. For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe *a man* with rags.

Earnest admonitions against drunkenness and gluttony. Upon the two Hebrew words translated, "riotous eaters of flesh," the question arises whether the "flesh" referred to is that of animals eaten, or of the human body wasted by gluttony and a lascivious life. The lexicons and the common usage of the Heb. word for flesh [בָּשָׂר] favor the latter, yet the sort of correlated use of the participle for "glutton" against "drunkard" looks toward the other construction. (Compare Deut. 21: 20.) The general sense of the passage is scarcely affected by this diversity.

22. Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old.

Let thy respect for thy father and thy mother be abiding—fresh and strong even though they have become "old." Let not the notion that the age you chance to live in is "progressive" flatter your pride into the assumption that your wisdom and experience are better than theirs. It is beautiful to see the honor and regard due from children to parents cherished their life long in filial bosoms. God sheds his blessings on such sons and daughters.

23. Buy the truth, and sell *it* not; *also* wisdom, and instruction, and understanding.

Get hold of truth at any cost; pay its price and take it; but never sell it! Part with it for no consideration! Its value is above rubies! —— To expand more fully the idea embraced in the word "truth," he subjoins—"wisdom, instruction, understanding."—— That must be pre-eminently precious which the wise Solomon, taught of God, exhorts us to buy perpetually but never to sell. Obeying this direction, we shall accumulate a vast store.

24. The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice: and he that begetteth a wise *child* shall have joy of him.

25. Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice.

Compare vs. 15, 16, the same sentiment which is expanded and reiterated here.

26. My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.

The heart asked for here includes both diligent attention and affectionate confidence. Cherish my words; believe them and obey. —— Probably as the words stand here, they have special reference to the exhortations that immediately follow — exhortations so vital to the welfare of every son that a father might well preface them with this beautiful and pertinent entreaty.

27. For a whore *is* a deep ditch; and a strange woman *is* a narrow pit.

28. She also lieth in wait as *for* a prey, and increaseth the transgressors among men.

Compare 22: 14. The point of the figure is that her victims will never or almost never escape from her deadly grasp. Once in her snare, they are lost—lost to virtue, lost to happiness, lost to society, lost as to their own welfare for this world and for all worlds! —— She lieth in wait *as a robber* [so the Hebrew], and she multiplieth transgressors among men. Many of the otherwise strong and mighty fall before her, never to rise again. (Compare 7: 26, 27.) The observation of the discerning in all ages confirms the fearful truth so strongly put here, that no form of sin holds its victims with more unyielding grasp than this; no form breaks down all self-recuperative power and hurries men to their graves more swiftly or more fearfully.

29. Who hath wo? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes?

30. They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine.

31. Look thou not upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his color in the cup, *when* it moveth itself aright.

32. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.

This life-painting of the drunkard's experiences and miseries is done with a master's hand. —— Where will you look for woe? Where for sorrow? Where for the grouping of all these terrible ills (in one poor, wretched victim)? Only there—in the men that tarry long over their wine, protracting their carousals deep into the midnight hours—the men who in those times made their drink more intoxicating and maddening by strong spices. —— At this point the writer fitly interposes the warning—"Look not on the wine when it is red (the red wine being stronger than the white); when it sparkles brilliantly in the cup; when it flows down the throat smoothly with a mellowness free from astringency; for though it has these bewitching attractions to your eye, to your taste, and to your excitable nerves, yet at the last, its bite is the serpent's—its sting, the adder's! —— The word rendered "babbling" some render solicitude; others, complaint. Babbling is wonderfully true to fact, but the Hebrew word as well as the drift of this description favor the sense of moaning, sighing—indications of trouble, and sorrow.——Wounds self-inflicted —which have no necessary cause, and which the wretched man might just as well have avoided by keeping sober.——"Giveth its color in the cup," is literally its *eye*, in the sense of its "bead" or sparkle.

33. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things.

34. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast.

35. They have stricken me, *shalt thou say, and* I was not sick; they have beaten me, *and* I felt *it* not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.

The intoxication of wine fires and maddens lascivious passion; thine eyes rove toward strange women, harlots. Thine heart utters all perverse things; frivolity, obscenity, profanity, pour forth from the heart of the drunkard. —— Lying down in the heart of the sea or on the top of a mast, swayed to and fro, tossed up and down — may be supposed to indicate the sensations of the drunken man; or more probably the point here intended is his imminent yet unconscious peril. His sensations appear in the next verse. In point of peril, he is like a sailor-boy sleeping in his frail canoe in the heart of the rough sea, or on the top of the rocking mast. Then, half rousing from his stupor, he

says, "They have stricken me, but I was not sick; they have beaten me; I felt it not. They have kicked me about; thrown me into the gutter. Little did I know or care, only to ask, When will this stupor be off? Then I will be to my cups again!"——Oh, the appetite that is never quenched! Alas, the bands strong as death that bind the inebriate to this worse than beastly life—to this destiny of shame and woe!

## CHAPTER XXIV.

1. Be not thou envious against evil men, neither desire to be with them:

2. For their heart studieth destruction, and their lips talk of mischief.

The frequent admonitions of the Scriptures (*e. g.*, Ps. 37 and 73 and Prov. 3: 31 and 23: 17 and 24: 19) against being envious of the wicked assume that they often prosper in this world, at least for a season, and that we need to be reminded that a God of retributive justice has an account to settle with them except they repent, and that his favor is more to us than all earthly good can ever be. It follows that God's children never can have any good reason for being envious of the prosperity of the wicked. The special point added here is a caution against being intimate with them because their heart will plot destruction and their lips will speak evil. Consequently their social influence over you will be morally perilous.

3. Through wisdom is a house builded; and by understanding it is established:

4. And by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches.

Wisdom is always useful in its application to the common business of life. It helps to build houses well, to give them a firm foundation, to furnish and to fill their chambers. Perhaps the gist of the proverb is to suggest that the same good judgment which proves itself so useful in the common matters of our external life must be worthy of our confidence and of our diligent pursuit and careful use in the greater and more vital matters of our moral and eternal life—the treasures to be garnered in "the house not made with hands."

5. A wise man *is* strong yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength.

6. For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counselors *there is* safety.

Wisdom is strength—the version which Solomon would give to the modern adage: "Knowledge is power." In Solomon's form of statement and in his view of the case, it is not every kind of knowledge that is power. This can be said only of that knowledge of practical sort which works itself naturally into skillful and right doing, which enables its possessor to form judicious plans and execute them efficiently.——He adds that this is eminently useful in war. The same wisdom of judgment should rule in all the great questions of human life, and most of all in those which respect man's relations to his Maker. Compare Prov. 21: 22 and 20: 18 and 11: 14.

7. Wisdom *is* too high for a fool: he openeth not his mouth in the gate.

The Hebrews spake of things difficult of attainment as being *high*. So Moses said of the commandments which God had given the people through him (Deut. 30: 12), "It is not in heaven that thou shouldst say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it and do it," etc.——"The fool will not open his mouth in the gate"—the gate being the place for the courts of justice and the counsels of the wise—for wisdom therefore and knowledge—far too high for the fool to reach. That is, therefore, no place for him; he has not the first element of fitness for such responsibilities.

8. He that deviseth to do evil shall be called a mischievous person.

This proverb gives the name which the bad man here described will get and ought to get in the community. If he is known to give his mind to schemes of mischief, men will call him a *master-mischief-maker*. He may have the honor of being lord (in Heb. "*baal*"], but it is lord of mischief-plotting. Let him wear his honors.

9. The thought of foolishness *is* sin: and the scorner *is* an abomination to men.

The word for "thought" [זִמָּה] is stronger [toward mischief] than a mere idea or mental conception. It describes crafty cunning schemes of folly. Solomon declares that this is sin.——All men abominate the scorner, the man who has no respect for his fellows, but, lifting himself proudly above them, would fain look down upon them scornfully. Who can love or esteem such a spirit?

10. *If* thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength *is* small.

The Hebrew plays somewhat upon the words of this proverb—"If thou faint in the day of *straitness*, thy strength is straitened, *i. e.*, shut up, limited, of small account. The day of straitness comes to test man's strength; let him see to it that he proves himself equal to his emergency.

11. If thou forbear to deliver *them that are* drawn unto death, and *those that are* ready to be slain:

12. If thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider *it?* and he that keepeth thy soul, doth *not* he know *it?* and shall *not* he render to *every* man according to his works?

While the general sentiment of this passage is expressed in the English version, the more precise translation is no less strong and pertinent, thus: "Deliver those who are bornè toward death; O do thou rescue those who move on trembling toward the slaughter. For shouldst thou say, "Behold, we have not known this [man], the Ponderer [Searcher] of hearts—will not He detect; the Watcher of thy soul—will not He know; and will He not requite to man as his work" [may be]?——The innocent and helpless are seen dragged away to their death; the voice of God comes through the inspired proverb—Rush thou to the rescue! If thou shouldest say, That man is a stranger, we know him not: of what concern is his case to us? will not the Great God fathom thy selfish heart, and prove thy lying lips, and hold thee to a stern and solemn responsibility to meet the claims of our common humanity? ——In ancient as in modern times, cases of unjust arraignment and causeless prosecution might not unfrequently arise under the despotic governments of oriental countries. In our age we have seen a whole race causelessly crushed under a cruel and often deadly bondage. Here is God's view of the responsibility and duty, not of professedly good men only, but of every living man, toward such sufferers.

13. My son, eat thou honey, because *it is* good; and the honeycomb, *which is* sweet to thy taste:

14. So *shall* the knowledge of wisdom *be* unto thy soul: when thou hast found *it*, then there shall be a reward, and thy expectation shall not be cut off.

Inasmuch as the sweetness of wisdom to the soul is manifestly compared to the sweetness of honey to the taste, it seems better to read v. 13, not as a command to eat honey, but as a comparison; "*As* thou dost eat honey because it is good and sweet upon thy palate; *So* get thou the knowledge of wisdom, for it shall be no less sweet to thy soul. Its rewards are sure to all who find, and their expectation of good therefrom can by no means fail.

15. Lay not wait, O wicked *man*, against the dwelling of the righteous; spoil not his resting place:

16. For a just *man* falleth seven times, and riseth up again: but the wicked shall fall into mischief.

The tacit assumption here is that just men are helped to rise by their Great Protector and Defender. "Seven," a round for a large indefinite number, means that however often he may fall, he will rise again. Take heed, therefore, O thou wicked man, lest thou be found fighting against God!——Also this sentiment is here—that while the just shall surely rise after his fall, no such rising is to be the lot of the wicked. Their fall is to be final and fatal.

17. Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth:

18. Lest the LORD see *it*, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him.

Does the writer express a doubt whether the Lord will see your joy over your fallen enemy, and whether it will displease him? I judge that the word "lest" should not be pressed so as to imply any uncertainty on this point. God will surely know it if we exult over a fallen enemy! He does not expect us to interpret his providences to the extent of assuming that we can determine for what particular sin he sends special judgments, and may infer from the calamities that befall our enemy that God has taken our side in our controversy.——The moral tone of this proverb is high—nothing lower than to love our enemies and cherish kindness and pity toward them in their calamity.——"And he [God] turns away his wrath from him" [thine enemy], seems tacitly to imply that he also turns it against thee.

19. Fret not thyself because of evil *men*, neither be thou envious at the wicked;

20. For there shall be no reward to the evil *man;* the candle of the wicked shall be put out.

The reason assigned here against fretfulness and envy toward the wicked is that there is really nothing in their lot that should excite such feelings. Far otherwise. Alas! they have no reward, no blessed future: their lamp of light and hope shall go out in eternal darkness! O how little dost thou understand their case and their doom when thou art envious of their prosperity! Rather come and drop a tear over their mad infatuation and their bitter end!

21. My son, fear thou the LORD and the king: *and* meddle not with them that are given to change:

22. For their calamity shall rise suddenly; and who knoweth the ruin of them both?

The king, as appointed of God to rule over men, should be

*nonored* and feared, for reasons similar to those which demand of us homage and reverence toward God. Have no association with those who are fickle and revolutionary, never satisfied with things as they are. Such men are sure to meet a swift and fearful retribution! Take heed lest thou perish with them!——"The ruin of them both" is the destruction inflicted upon these traitors and rebels by both God and the king. The ruin *of them* is not the ruin they experience, but the ruin they inflict.

23. These *things* also *belong* to the wise. *It is* not good to have respect of persons in judgment.

The remaining part of this chapter seems to be a special appendix.——The sin of having respect of persons in judicial decisions is so flagrant and withal was so common that Solomon reiterates his rebuke of it. See 18: 5 and notes there. Also 28: 21.

24. He that saith unto the wicked, Thou *art* righteous; him shall the people curse, nations shall abhor him:

25. But to them that rebuke *him* shall be delight, and a good blessing shall come upon them.

"He that saith," *i. e.*, in his place as a judge, in his judicial decisions, to which the proverb has special reference. To say this under any circumstances is wrong, but to say it as a civil judge is a most flagrant wrong. The thing said here is that such a judge shall be execrated by all mankind. All the good, all who appreciate the need of civil government for its legitimate purposes of justice to the otherwise defenseless, will abhor and even curse him. But the judge who rebukes the evil doer shall be a delight, regarded with favor and gratitude. Blessings of goodness shall come upon him; the good will wish him well and give him their benediction.

26. *Every man* shall kiss *his* lips that giveth a right answer.

Probably the same subject continues before the mind. If so, this right answer is either the right decision of the judge, or the right testimony of the witness whose evidence promotes the ends of justice. "Men will kiss his lips," thus expressing their love and esteem.

27. Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and afterward build thine house.

In the climate of Palestine this was doubtless good advice. Look first to your grounds; prepare them for the seed and secure your harvests in their season: this done, turn, if you will, to house-building. Till then live in tents; any mere shelter from the storm will suffice you. Houses were rather luxuries than necessities.

28. Be not a witness against thy neighbor without cause; and deceive *not* with thy lips.

Perhaps the most vital question touching the sense and bearing of this proverb is—Does it assume that "thy neighbor" is innocent, or does it apply in a case where he is guilty? If "thy neighbor" is here assumed to be innocent, the writer means, Be not a witness against him *with no foundation of truth* for your testimony—with no just cause. Why should you deceive with your lips to bring evil upon the innocent? Why (according to the next verse) should you cherish the spirit of retaliation, taking vengeance into your own hand for some supposed injury done yourself?—— On the other hand, if the writer does *not* assume the innocence of "thy neighbor" but tacitly admits his guilt, the admonition would lie against being officious in reporting all the evil you may know against your neighbor; *e. g.*, in a case not sufficiently flagrant to call for judicial investigation. Make no gratuitous exposure of trivial offenses; do not appear as a witness unless the greater good require it. The latter sense is, for ought I see, admissible, yet, on the whole, I prefer the former as being more in harmony with the latter clause of the verse. This latter clause, if we accept the punctuation of the Heb. text, should read interrogatively—"And wilt thou deceive with thy lips? Will you permit your malign feelings to lead you into actual falsehood for the sake of bringing punishment upon your innocent neighbor?"

29. Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work.

See 20: 22 and notes there. Personal retaliation assumes to take the administration of justice out of the hand of the Almighty, as if you could not wait his time, or had no confidence in his justice. Can you hope to please God by such implied imputations against him and by thus assuming his prerogatives? Can you suppose that He will quietly resign his throne to you that you may gratify your excited passion, or even what you suppose to be your just indignation? Remember *who* has said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay."

30. I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding;

31. And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, *and* nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down.

Remarkably Solomon associates sloth with folly, as if he assumed that every sensible and wise man will be industrious and will take good care of his farm and garden.——But on the grounds of the slothful, void of understanding, all is dilapidated and desolate!

32. Then I saw, *and* considered *it* well: I looked upon *it*, *and* received instruction.

33. *Yet* a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep:

34. So shall thy poverty come *as* one that traveleth; and thy want as an armed man.

I studied that spectacle diligently and long, and I found it truly instructive. See what I learned then of the ways of the slothful: "A little more sleep," said he, "a little more slumber"—more, more, and yet more! "So" [if thou doest] shall thy poverty come like a highwayman ["one that traveleth"], and his coming will break upon thee at dead of night, in the depth of thy fancied security, and he gives no note of warning!——This scene affords us a symbol—at once vivid and but too truthful—of the moral ruin which comes over the soul of the spiritual sluggard. He, too, makes this the law of his life—"A little more sleep, a little more slumber"—a little more procrastination of life's chief work, heedlessly quenching the sense of present duty, drowning his more grave convictions under the din and roar of earthly bustle; studying evermore to be so engrossed with cares or with pleasures as never to think deeply and solemnly of God and of his own momentous responsibilities: so he sleeps and dreams life away; but his soul, ah, how desolate of moral culture and of moral fruit unto God! Oh, those thorns and weeds of sinful growth; and what shall be the end thereof? So shall thy poverty come like the mounted highwayman—thy want like an armed man!

## CHAPTER XXV.

1. These *are* also proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out.

The portion of the book commencing here (chaps. 25–29) was transcribed and compiled by men appointed to this service by king Hezekiah. It is of small account to us to inquire in whose keeping they had been during the period of two hundred and seventy-five years since the death of Solomon; how many copies of them were in existence; or why these were not introduced into the sacred canon at the same time with the earlier portions of this book. The bar to such inquiries is that we know nothing on the subject and have no means of knowing.——Who those men were, of literary taste or of religious sympathy, who made and kept copies of these admirable proverbs; whether or not they bore public responsibilities and acted in that capacity, there remain no

data for determining. It must suffice us to know that these proverbs were extant; that they came to the knowledge of Hezekiah; and that he employed suitable men to copy them and append them as we see here, to the previously compiled proverbs of Solomon.

2. *It is* the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honor of kings *is* to search out a matter.

The form of the antithesis here is quite remarkable. It is God's glory that his ways are unsearchable, past finding out, and that he takes none into his secret counsels to avail himself of their wisdom, but in this sense rules the universe *alone*, in his own infinite knowledge, wisdom and love. The case of human kings is not put in precise contrast with this. The writer only says that it is their glory to search out every matter upon which they have occasion to act officially—their glory to understand it fully before they take action. In this restricted sense, it is their glory to search out, while as to his own plans, it is God's glory to conceal.

3. The heaven for height, and the earth for depth, and the heart of kings *is* unsearchable.

As the heaven is too high and the earth too deep to be explored, so is the heart of kings. They hold a position so removed from their subjects; they may, at least if they choose, seclude themselves so much from intimate association and may so thoroughly keep their secrets to themselves that no man can search them out.

4. Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer.

5. Take away the wicked *from* before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness.

As the dross must be removed from the silver to render it malleable and fit to be wrought into vessels by the artist, so let wicked men be taken away from before the king, let them have no place in his counsels; then shall his throne be established in righteousness. Bad men are to him and to his throne what dross is to silver.

6. Put not forth thyself in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great *men:*

7. For better *it is* that it be said unto thee, Come up hither; than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of the prince whom thine eyes have seen.

Do not make a display of thyself in presence of the king and thrust thyself into the place of the great; for it is better that thou shouldest be invited to go up higher than to be put lower in the presence of the prince.——The reader will be struck with the close resemblance of this sentiment to that propounded by our

Lord (Luke 14: 8–11). It is a principle of wide application and of the soundest wisdom.

8. Go not forth hastily to strive, lest *thou know not* what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbor hath put thee to shame.

The precise translation is thus: "Go not rashly into strife lest—what wilt thou do in the latter end thereof?" We may take "*what*" as essentially an interrogative; or we may supply other words as in the English version.——Prof. Stuart gives it—"Lest thou shouldest do something in the latter end," etc., *i. e.*, something desperate, outrageous; something to be ashamed of.——The sense is obvious and full of wisdom. Beware of plunging yourself rashly into strife.

9. Debate thy cause with thy neighbor *himself;* and discover not a secret to another:

10. Lest he that heareth *it* put thee to shame, and thine infamy turn not away.

The mutual relation of all the points made in these verses is not absolutely certain. The choice seems to lie between these two constructions: (1) If dispute or controversy arise between thy neighbor and thyself, keep it between yourselves, and disclose not to him any secret you may have in your keeping which would bear injuriously or offensively upon him, lest hearing it, he should be irritated, and the difference between you become irreconcilable, to your perpetual shame. Or (2) thus: Disclose nothing to others which ought to remain a secret between your neighbor and yourself lest he hear of it, and so it shall work his irritation and your shame. In either construction it is a caution against being tempted to betray secrets unwisely and worst of all, maliciously, by any variance between yourself and your neighbor.

11. A word fitly spoken *is like* apples of gold in pictures of silver.

"Fitly spoken," spoken in the fitting time and wisely adapted to all the circumstances. As to the precise thing to which it is here compared, critics differ, leaving us to choose between (1) some actual fruit, *e. g.*, not American apples in Asia, but quinces or citrons of gold color, served in a dish ornamented with silver; and (2) real gold and silver, wrought into tapestry, to be suspended for ornamental purposes. In either construction the figure is beautiful, and sets forth a very beautiful scene in social life. Let him who would make social life a thing of beauty and joy, study how to put in "words fitly spoken" on every opportune occasion. The original word used here I take to mean precisely, *according to the circumstances of the case.*

12. *As* an ear-ring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, *so is* a wise reprover upon an obedient ear.

Reproof wisely given and kindly received, or rather, the man who administers reproof wisely, tenderly, to one who opens his ear and his heart thankfully to hear and to profit thereby, are next compared to the finest ornament of gold—a scene in the social and moral world the beauty of which Solomon had an eye to see, a heart to appreciate, and a pen to describe with exquisite charm. Such moral culture, such winning ways to draw the young from folly to wisdom, are indeed more angelic than any ornament of fine gold can avail to represent. Note the admirable spirit of the Psalmist (141: 5).

13. As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, *so is* a faithful messenger to them that send him: for he refresheth the soul of his masters.

Ice-water in a hot summer day gives us the true sense of this figure. So is a reliable messenger to his employers. They can trust him and they are refreshed by his fidelity to his trust.

14. Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift *is like* clouds and wind without rain.

It matters little whether this false [*i. e.*, deceitful] gift is false in its *quality*, being really worthless, or false *as to the promise* of giving, this promise being fulfilled in no sense whatever, nothing at all being given. The original will bear either construction. The figure—clouds and wind, but no rain—looks specially to the great parade of promise, set off against the utter failure of performance.

15. By long forbearing is a prince persuaded, and a soft tongue breaketh the bone.

If you have occasion to persuade a prince, be very patient and keep your temper; use gentle persuasions, but no irritating reproaches or stern demands.——The pertinence of the figure, "a soft tongue breaketh the bone," may not be at first view particularly obvious. A soft tongue would be in itself a very insufficient hammer upon a hard bone. But in the animal world, the soft tongue belongs to the flesh-eating and bone-cranching species, while the rough, corrugated tongue characterizes the grass-eating. The soft tongue therefore is mighty, not in itself, but in its accompaniments—the sharp incisors and the powerful jaws. The figure is therefore exquisitely pertinent: the soft tongue, apparently at first view a powerless thing upon hard bone, but in its accompaniments strikingly effective, well represents the almost magic power of soft words to soothe the roughest souls and break the toughest hearts.

16. Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it.

The gist of this proverb is, Beware lest you eat too much; be careful to eat no more than will suffice you; no more than your stomach can bear.——In Palestine, honey was found wild and often naturally in large quantities, by hungry men. Hence the temptation to excess, and hence this caution, the spirit of which should pass over to every form of animal indulgence. In the hour of abundance, and in the face of its temptations, guard against excess. The reaction of abused nature is by no means comfortable.

17. Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbor's house; lest he be weary of thee, and *so* hate thee.

The Heb. verb for "withdraw" [יָקַר] in the form which occurs here, may mean either to make *precious* or to make *rare*. It perhaps suggested to the Hebrew reader the sense: *make precious by making rare;* make your presence more sought for by never overdoing your calls to the annoyance and disgust of your neighbor. "Lest he be weary"—*sated*, as a man who has eaten too much honey—the writer using the same word here as in the next preceding proverb for the effect of excess in the use of honey. This proverb seems to be correlated to that.

18. A man that beareth false witness against his neighbor *is* a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow.

None of these death-weapons are more terrible than the false and slanderous tongue, perjuring itself in order to ruin a neighbor in the vital issues of a trial before the courts of justice. Slander anywhere, under any circumstances, is a death-weapon wielded against a man's good name — such a name being often felt to be dearer to man or to woman than life.

19. Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble *is like* a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint.

As a broken tooth for eating, and a foot out of joint for walking, so is confidence in a faithless man in the time when you really need him. You lean on him, and he not only fails you but fills you with pain.

20. *As* he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, *and as* vinegar upon nitre: so *is* he that singeth songs to an heavy heart.

This "taking away of a garment" is not the robbery of another man, but rather the laying off of one's own principal, outside garment in a cool day — unsuitable and dangerous.——The word "nitre" here (as in Jer. 2: 22) is not the article known now under that name, *i. e.* salt-petre, a neutral salt which is not specially

disturbed by the application of vinegar; but it represents a mineral alkali well known in Palestine and much used with oil in the manufacture of soap. Vinegar applied to this, produces an active effervescence under which both the alkali and the acid lose their peculiar properties. The point of the comparison is the disturbance, the commotion, the signals of repellency which are thrown out. So is the singing of jovial songs to a sad heart—a thing uncongenial, repulsive, which stirs up a most unwelcome effervescence in the soul. Or according to the first figure, it gives you the chills. In his hours of joy the same man who is now sad might love that music and welcome its sentiment; but how can his heart endure it in his days of sadness?

21. If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink:

22. For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee.

V. 22 means, *For in this way* thou wilt heap coals, etc. The specification of bread to your enemy when hungry, water when thirsty, of course represents any and every act of kindness and love. The sentiment is—Love your enemies and *show it by doing them good.* So you may melt down the ice of their frozen hearts, or as the Hebrew figure puts it—of their frozen *heads.*——The critics have raised the question whether these "coals of fire" denote the retributive vengeance of God in punishment for your enemy's sin, or the subduing power of love which your kindness would bring to bear upon a cold heart. In my judgment the former must be rejected; the latter accepted — the universal law of human nature being that kindness, manifested love, in requital for unkindness and hate, has power above every thing else possible to man to melt frigid souls. Done with this kind intent, God will reward it. The figure requires us to think of the effect of kindness as shown by a man to his enemy, and not of any retribution from God upon him. —— See how Paul (Rom. 12: 20) cites and uses this passage. Dismiss (says he) all thought of vengeance; leave vengeance to God alone, and turn thine heart wholly to kindness: so shalt thou overcome evil with good. Our Lord has the same doctrine in its comprehensive form (Mat. 5: 44): "Love your enemies," etc. The same doctrine of morality, the same law of love, appears in both the Old Testament and the New. A sublimely glorious doctrine indeed!

23. The north wind driveth away rain: so *doth* an angry countenance a backbiting tongue.

The sense of the English margin, and not that of the English text, is now accepted by all modern critics: "A wind from the north (probably *north-west* more precisely) drives on [not drives away] the rain—the great rain storms of Palestine coming from the Mediterranean. So does a backbiting tongue by its covert

slander bring on a dark, lowering face, a soul full of indignation. Every man instinctively abhors the sly insinuations of slander, especially when himself is the victim.

24. *It is* better to dwell in the corner of the house-top, than with a brawling woman and in a wide house.

In 21: 9, we have the same language; in 21: 19, the same sentiment.

25. *As* cold waters to a thirsty soul, so *is* good news from a far country.

It is assumed that this good news not only comes from far but from a dear friend. Such news brings a wealth of joy, fitly compared to cold water to one suffering from heat and thirst.

26. A righteous man falling down before the wicked *is as* a troubled fountain, and a corrupt spring.

Oriental travelers are often sadly disappointed to find the fountain in the desert which they have traveled far to reach "troubled" and "corrupted"—tramped and fouled—by the feet and the offal of camels, asses—every animal of the desert. Having hoped for pure, wholesome water, they look with sad and sinking heart upon this loathsome mass. Such is the spectacle when a righteous man succumbs before the wicked. It would be a most welcome sight to see him stand up a bold witness for truth and righteousness. It is deplorably sad to see him bowing abjectly before the wicked, whether in moral or in physical weakness, but most in moral.

27. It *is* not good to eat much honey: so *for men* to search their own glory *is not* glory.

Very different constructions have been put upon this proverb. The Heb. words do not determine whether the relation of the two clauses to each other is corresponding or antithetic—to be expressed by "so" or by *but, on the other hand.* The last clause has no negative ["*is not*"]. Then we have also the question whether the word for "glory" [כָּבוֹד], twice occurring, is used in the good sense or the bad, *i. e.*, in the sense of what is truly honorable, noble; or of mere reputation, vain glory. We have also the further question whether we must fall back upon the primary though not most common sense of the word, viz.: things difficult, heavy, burdensome.——In view of these difficulties, critics have interpreted the passage variously; *e. g.*, as in our English version (Ges.); "The searching out of deep, [divine] things is burdensome" (Fuerst); "The searching after one's own glory is wearisome" (Muenscher); "The investigation of things difficult to be understood is an honor, and never, like honey-eating, excessive" (Maurer); "The search of their glory is glory" (Wordsworth). ——In my view Solomon's usage of this word "glory" should be

essentially decisive. We have it fully brought out in this Book of Proverbs. Thus in this chapter (v. 2): "It is the *glory* of God to conceal a thing; but the glory (Eng. "honor") of kings is to search out a matter;" (this "search out" being the same as in our passage). This glory is the gift of Wisdom (3 : 17). In her left hand riches and *glory* [Eng. "honor"]. "The wise shall inherit *glory*" (3 : 35). So also 8 : 18, "Riches and *glory* are with me;" and 11 : 16 and 21 : 21 and 15 : 33 and 18 : 12 and 22 : 4. The use of "glory," in the good sense, is invariable. Hence it seems to be imperative that we give it the good sense here. The search after true glory is glorious—like the sentiment announced by Paul (Rom. 2 : 7): "To them who seek for glory, honor, and immortality, eternal life."——The word "search" implies diligent and earnest, and usually, if not always, *noble* pursuit.——Of course in this construction, the last clause is not corresponding (as to the first) but antithetic. You may eat too much honey; *but* there is no danger of seeking too earnestly for real glory, for what is truly noble.

28. He that *hath* no rule over his own spirit *is like* a city *that is* broken down, *and* without walls.

In Oriental countries cities needed walls and towers; else they were exposed to pillage and even utter destruction. So a man's spirit with no self-control stands all exposed to enemies from within as well as from without. Every passion runs riot and makes a wreck of the poor, defenseless soul. Temptations from without also keep him in perpetual peril. How forcibly is his case put here—an Oriental city with no walls, and every house in ruins!

## CHAPTER XXVI.

1. As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest, so honor is not seemly for a fool.

The unseemliness which forms the point in common to the two clauses here is not so much that of appearance—the look of the thing—as of inutility, the mischief it brings. Honor is unbecoming to a fool, because it is only a curse to him and a waste of all the blessings which honor ought normally to bear with it. Even as rain and snow are in their time great blessings, but out of time, fearful calamities.

2. As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come.

As the bird gives himself to aimless and indefinite flying which harms no one and hits no mark; so the curse which you have never deserved will only fly in the air and will never fall upon you. The causeless curse comes with no moral force and need never be feared.

3. A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back.

Fitness is here the one point in common. The horse needs the whip, the ass the bridle, and the fool's back, for the same reason, the rod of correction. It is assumed that by reason of his folly the persuasions of wisdom and the law of kindness are unavailing, so that nothing remains but the rod.

4. Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him.

5. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.

Obviously these two proverbs are placed together that each may throw light upon the sense of the other. A slight enigma, a sort of paradox, gives zest to them both. The words "according to" admit two somewhat different shades of meaning, and this difference is the clew to the true sense of this pair of proverbs; thus: Answer not the fool *foolishly*, according to the *spirit* of his folly, lest thou become like him. But answer a fool *as his folly deserves*, according to the *desert* of his folly, lest he be left to suppose that he has said a very smart thing and become even more wise in his own conceit than ever before. Rebuke him; expose his folly to his own eyes: but beware of being drawn by sympathy into the same strain of foolish talking.

6. He that sendeth a message by the hand of a fool cutteth off the feet, *and* drinketh damage.

You might as well cut off the messenger's feet so that he can not go at all as send your message by the hand of a fool. His folly will certainly frustrate all your hope of a useful result.—"Drinking damage" is taking it in bountifully, on a large scale. Solomon would not trust a fool with any important message.

7. The legs of the lame are not equal: so *is* a parable in the mouth of fools.

The most approved construction of the central word [Eng. "are not equal"] is this: The legs of the lame *hang pendulous*, drag; so does a parable in the mouth of fools. They see not the pith of it and lack the good sense to apply it. It moves on their lips with a limping, halting gait. None but sensible men catch the true meaning of the real proverb and know how to speak it impressively.

8. As he that bindeth a stone in a sling, so *is* he that giveth honor to a fool.

Upon the precise sense of the first clause critics have differed somewhat widely. Several (Gesenius, Rosenmueller, and other Germans) give the sense which appears in the English margin, "As one who puts a precious stone in a heap of [common] stones," etc. But in this construction neither of the three Hebrew words is taken in its best established and most probable sense.——Others (Fuerst, Stuart, Muenscher) say—"As one who binds a stone in a sling (*i. e.*, so that it can not leave the sling and fly to its mark), so is he that giveth honor to a fool." The effort in both cases is a failure. The stone can not reach its mark because it is tied in the sling; honor can not reach the fool. But this illustration is by no means either obvious or pertinent.——Maurer gives the verb translated "bind" the sense, to *hurl:* as one who *hurleth* a stone with a sling, so, etc., *i. e.*, honor given to a fool is honor thrown away—it flies like a stone from a sling. This would do well if the verb [צָרַר] would bear this construction. Unfortunately the verb means to *bind* and not to *hurl.*——Looking still further therefore for the precise sense of this figure, I suggest that the capital mistake of the critics has been their assuming that the stone is tied in the sling *effectually*, so as to be fastened there. But suppose the fact to be that such tying of a stone in a sling is a practical impossibility. Think of tying into a sling one of David's five smooth stones (1 Sam. 17: 40) chosen out of the brook, well-water-worn. You might about as well tie a rifle-ball into its place upon the powder and expect it to stay there, despite of the explosive force of burnt powder. So a stone must tear itself away from the sling with prodigious force if it is so hurled as to fly with deadly effect to its distant mark. This then is the pith of the proverb. Honor will not stick to a fool. It can no more abide with him than a smooth stone will abide in the sling when the hurling impulse is felt tearing it away. Honor even tied down upon a fool will keep its place just as a stone tied in a sling keeps its place—*i. e.*, by no possibility, for one moment.

9. *As* a thorn goeth into the hand of a drunkard, so *is* a parable in the mouth of fools.

If with our English version we assume that the thorn goes into the hand of the drunkard, we must, if we follow the Hebrew, make the parable *pierce into* the mouth of fools, *i. e.*, to harm themselves rather than others. In the Hebrew the words are the same; *in* the hand; *in* the mouth. The better sense is, As a thorn-bush borne aloft in [or with] the hand of the drunkard, to the peril of all bystanders, so is a parable in the mouth of fools. The parable with its sharp cutting points will be hurled at random, right and left, to wound all sensitive souls. Fools will surely brandish the stiletto or the long sword with no sort of care or discrimination.

10. The great *God* that formed all *things* both rewardeth the fool, and rewardeth transgressors.

An unusual degree of obscurity and uncertainty attaches to this proverb, from the fact that the first two Heb. words may be derived from very different roots, and hence may have quite diverse meanings. I on the whole prefer this construction: "As the archer who pierces all," *i. e.*, who casts abroad wounds and death indiscriminately; so is one who hires [into his service] the fool, or who hires transgressors. No man can do this without getting wounds, as from the piercing arrow, or as we might say, without getting *bitten*.

11. As a dog returneth to his vomit, *so* a fool returneth to his folly.

As the dog turns back to eat again what he has vomited, so a fool repeats his folly of speech over and over. It never goes against his stomach! Thoroughly caustic! But Solomon probably considered that nothing but a very sharp-edged proverb will pierce into the tough sensibilities of the fool.

12. Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? *there is* more hope of a fool than of him.

"Wise in his own eyes" [Heb.] means in his own view of himself. There is more hope of improvement in the case of the ignorant, untaught, uncultured man than in his. Self-conceit is a more fatal bar to knowledge and true wisdom than ignorance or even stupidity. He who thinks himself wise enough already scorns all diligent application and real study. It seems to him a tacit and humiliating admission that he does not know everything yet.

13. The slothful *man* saith, *There is* a lion in the way; a lion *is* in the streets.

See 22: 13.

14. *As* the door turneth upon his hinges, so *doth* the slothful upon his bed.

As the door, with no self-moving power, turns not itself but only *is* turned, so the slothful may be sarcastically represented as too lazy (of his own motion) even to turn over in his bed. Or perhaps the point of the comparison may be that as the door can have no other motion than that of turning to and fro upon its hinges, so the sluggard never moves beyond rolling from side to side upon his bed – never rises to any active, useful labor.——These proverbs spare not the sluggard!

15. The slothful hideth his hand in *his* bosom; it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth.

Nearly the same words appear in 19: 24. The only difference is that this represents the sluggard as being *grieved*, afflicted (poor man!) with the labor of carrying his hand from the dish [of food] to his mouth! Not "bosom," but *dish* is admitted to be the sense of the Hebrew word.

16. The sluggard *is* wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.

The point of the sluggard's inactivity is here *mental*. He thinks he knows more than any number of men who can give intelligent answers. His knowledge comes by intuition, with no mental effort. But he is sure he has it far above the man of true intelligence. ——"Seven," a definite number for an indefinite, as in v. 25 and in 24: 16.

17. He that passeth by, *and* meddleth with strife *belonging* not to him, *is like* one that taketh a dog by the ears.

He who has no other interest than that of a passer-by, but yet involves himself in other people's quarrels, might as well pinch the ears of a ferocious dog. Oriental dogs were notoriously fierce. A man would get himself into gratuitous trouble by seizing their ears. Solomon would say, Keep aloof from other men's quarrels.

18. As a mad *man* who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death,

19. So *is* the man *that* deceiveth his neighbor, and saith, Am not I in sport?

As the word rendered "mad man" occurs only here, its precise meaning becomes a matter of dispute. Some give it the sense of insane, reckless, either through rage or utter lack of self-control; while others make it mean the recklessness of excessive fun which risks even extreme and fatal mischief for the sake of fine sport. The grounds for these respective opinions lie in the analogies of this Hebrew word with other kindred roots or with Arabic words. We can afford to forego these investigations inasmuch as the significance and force of the parable are but slightly affected by the points at issue.——The word for "firebrand" means fiery darts filled with combustibles. "Death" in this connection means death-bearing weapons. With one who recklessly hurls abroad such death-weapons, the proverb compares the man who deceives his neighbor with flagrant misrepresentations (big stories, perhaps), and then excuses his outrages of the truth by saying: "Am I not in sport?" Is it not admissible to tell lies in fun?—— The precise point of analogy in the proverb seems to be that fun is the same sort of apology in the latter case as in the former. It will justify him who throws out big lies equally with him who throws abroad death-weapons. Human flesh and blood are no more sacred than those interests of human souls which truth protects, and which falsehood and deception sacrifice.

20. Where no wood is, *there* the fire goeth out: so where *there is* no talebearer, the strife ceaseth.

The remarkable thing in this proverb is that so much should be attributed to the tongue. The doctrine is that an unruly tongue, malicious talking, is to strife what fuel is to fire. As fire dies when the fuel fails, so strife ceaseth when the mischief-making tongue is suppressed. The assumption seems to be that as the malign use of the tongue enkindles human passions and fires up strife, so if passionate men would keep still their anger would subside and their strife with others would cease. Taken as a universal statement it seems rather strong; for men sometimes nurse their wrath in sullen silence. But the proverb touches a great truth when it witnesses to the terrible power of a tattling tongue. Compare 16: 28.

21. *As* coals *are* to burning coals, and wood to fire; so *is* a contentious man to kindle strife.

The contentious man (literally, "the man of contentions") loves quarrels; is always in them; and has the skill to draw others in. He kindles strife as coals kindle dry wood. What a curse to society is he!

22. The words of a talebearer *are* as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.

The same words occur in chap. 18: 8.

23. Burning lips and a wicked heart *are like* a potsherd covered with silver dross.

Drossy silver, shining and showy but very impure and overlaying a potsherd withal, represents a man with warm kisses on his lips but foul malice in his heart.

24. He that hateth dissembleth with his lips, and layeth up deceit within him:

25. When he speaketh fair, believe him not: for *there are* seven abominations in his heart.

A man of malicious spirit ["a hater"] does not suffer his lips to divulge his malign feelings, but keeps them deep within. When he speaks smooth words [Heb. makes his voice soft, pleasing] believe him not; for there are seven [an uncounted number of] abominations in his heart.——Solomon does not say how we are to know this arch deceiver. He forewarns us that there are such men, and probably assumes that we must judge of them by those manifestations of a malign spirit which even arch dissemblers can not altogether conceal.

26. *Whose* hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness shall be shewed before the *whole* congregation.

This gives us the comforting assurance that the arch dissembler whose soul is full of malice, but who yet labors to cover it up with deceit, shall be exposed before the great congregation.

27. Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him.

This implies that he digs a pit for others to fall into, and rolls a stone up the hill to hurl it down upon other men's heads. His malicious labor reacts with curses upon himself. Haman thought to build a gallows for Mordecai; by God's overruling hand it came to pass that he built it for his own neck.

28. A lying tongue hateth *those that are* afflicted by it; and a flattering mouth worketh ruin.

A man of lying tongue hates those whom he slanders and traduces. Those who suffer from his lying tongue must also suffer from his increased hatred.——To explain this, some commentators say, The man who has slandered you hates you the more because he knows he has unjustly provoked your displeasure. It is much nearer the truth to say that having hated and slandered you, he is perpetually pressed in self-justification to make out that you have deserved it all and more. He does not love to think that this bad spirit of his is pure wickedness, that his slanderous words have no justification. Therefore his strong desire to justify himself commits him to think as ill of you as he can and hence urges him on to hate you the more. The homage which even the vilest of men are compelled to pay to abstract virtue does not make them candid enough to see the virtues of those they have maligned. It works rather to stimulate their malice and make them ignore every good quality or deed of those whom they have wronged.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

1. Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.

In this proverb, "*boast*" is the expressive word. Do not vainly and proudly assume that to-morrow is your own, so that you may claim and use it as you will with no recognition of God as the great Owner and really the Giver to mortals of all their earthly days. If even to-morrow—only one day onward—is not our own, how much less the days that lie still more remote in the future.—— The apostle James (4: 13–16) seems to have had this proverb in mind; "Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go

into such a city," etc. "But now ye rejoice in your *boastings*, etc., these boastings being manifested in their plans for the future, which left out all thought of God and assumed to have an absolute control of future days and circumstances as their own.

2. Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips.

Self-praise is specially liable to fail of its object. As a general rule it is better for one's reputation to forego praise altogether than to attempt to furnish it for one's self—the reason of which is not far to seek.

3. A stone *is* heavy, and the sand weighty; but a fool's wrath *is* heavier than them both.

By "the fool's wrath" I understand the vexation and trial which his presence occasions you. You can better afford to carry a load of sand or a weight of stones than such a burden.——Some commentators assume that the fool's ill temper and bad habits are a burden to himself, comparable to a load of sand. This may be true; but I doubt if it be precisely *the* truth which is put before us in this parable.

4. Wrath is cruel, and anger *is* outrageous, but who *is* able to stand before envy?

I take the word rendered "envy" to mean *jealousy*, in the specific form which this author portrays so vividly, chap. 6: 34, 35. When either party to the marriage bond becomes jealous of the other and the warmest and most sacred sensibilities known to the human heart are outraged, who can stand before their fury?

5. Open rebuke *is* better than secret love.

Both open rebuke and secret love are thought of here as pertaining to our professed friends in their bearing toward ourselves. It is better that they should rebuke us frankly than hide their love by silence when the case calls for reproof. Real love should by no means be silent ["secret"] when the best good of a friend demands a faithful word of admonition. This sentiment is developed yet more fully in the next proverb.

6. Faithful *are* the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy *are* deceitful.

The rebukes of true friendship may seem to wound, but let them be accepted gratefully and borne calmly. You can well afford this if they are faithful—the fruit of true fidelity and love. ——Over against this, the kisses of an enemy are *abundant* [the sense of the Heb.]—the idea of deceit being not expressed but implied. Coming from an enemy, the more numerous they are the more certainly are they deceitful.

7. The full soul loatheth an honey-comb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.

The English margin gives the precise sense of the Hebrew word for "loatheth," viz., tramples under foot. The appetite fully satiated can not bear even honey.

8. As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so *is* a man that wandereth from his place.

This proverb may be applied to a man's *place* in the sense of his house, his home, his family; or in the larger sense of his country. The verb "wander" favors the latter, and so also does the genius of the Hebrew system, civil and religious, which looked with disfavor upon emigration to foreign lands.

9. Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so *doth* the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel.

As oil, pleasantly scented, and perfume, are grateful to the sense of smell, so is the sweetness of friendship, manifested by affectionate hearty counsels. Good advice, such as manifestly comes up from the depths of a loving heart, is the sweetness of friendship, corresponding to the fragrance of sweet odors.

10. Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not; neither go into thy brother's house in the day of thy calamity: *for* better *is* a neighbor *that is* near, than a brother far off.

Heart friendship is more and better than consanguinity. Therefore cultivate true friendship; forsake neither your own friend nor your father's; prove yourself true to them that they may be true to you, for you can rely upon a long-tried friend more than on one who is merely a brother. Some have gone to a brother in their day of calamity to their bitter disappointment. A neighbor near in *sympathy and love* is better than a brother who in these respects is far away.——A similar sentiment appears in the last clause of 18: 24. Perhaps Solomon remembered that Amnon and Absalom were brothers; also Adonijah and himself; and on the other hand that his venerable father cherished the memory of Jonathan, and sought to bless his children for his sake.

11. My son, be wise, and make my heart glad, that I may answer him that reproacheth me.

The key to the last clause lies in the fact that society holds the father in a great measure responsible for the morals of his son, and therefore if he has not done his parental duty will reproach him for his neglect and failure. Hence Solomon says, Remember, my son, that my good name as well as yours is at stake, pending upon the life you live; therefore *be wise;* so shall my heart be

glad, and I can proudly point to your wisdom as my defense against those who would reproach me. (Compare 23: 15, 24.)

12. A prudent *man* foreseeth the evil, *and* hideth himself; *but* the simple pass on, *and* are punished.

Essentially the same appears in 22: 3.

13. Take his garment that is surety for a stranger, and take a pledge of him for a strange woman.

See the same in 20: 16.

14. He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse to him.

The writer thinks of these manifestations as excessive and therefore suspicious; unnatural, and therefore the fruit, not of true friendship, but of some sinister purpose.

15. A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike.

16. Whosoever hideth her hideth the wind, and the ointment of his right hand, *which* bewrayeth *itself.*

Flat roofs, mud-covered, thoroughly saturated in a day of great rain, leaking like a sieve, with not the cleanest of water, are the nearest like things to a quarrelsome woman — an irrepressible scold. Whoever for the honor of the house would hide her wrath, might as well hide the wind or the odors of perfumed oil which no skill can bind but which will proclaim itself. Or since the word for "hide" admits the sense of *restrain*, the meaning may be; Whoever would restrain her might as well bind the hurricane, or the strong odors of scented oil. —— But the last clause of v. 16 has been construed variously. It is not easy to decide between these conflicting constructions. Stuart gives it; "His right hand comes upon oil"—a thing so slippery that he can not grasp it to any purpose. Maurer; "His right hand calleth for oil"—*i. e.*, to bind up the wounds he gets from an infuriate woman. This has at least the merit of making out a strong case. Is it not a little far-fetched? If the sense of repressing, restraining, is carried forward from the first clause (which seems natural) then the received English version gives the most probable meaning.

17. Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.

The law of sympathy acts on the human face as friction does on iron. Solomon plays upon the slightly differing senses of two Hebrew verbs which have nearly the same radical letters; the first of which* means to *sharpen* as in the case of iron edge tools;

* חָדַד

the second,* to *brighten*, as the human countenance is lighted up with smiles by the law of human sympathy.

18. Whoso keepeth the fig-tree shall eat the fruit thereof: so he that waiteth on his master shall be honored.

"Keeping the fig-tree" is not merely to own and possess, but to cultivate diligently; to take due care of. Correspondingly, the servant who devotes himself to his duty to his master will be held in honor and rewarded.

19. As in water face *answereth* to face, so the heart of man to man.

In the East, the cheap and simple mirror used by the poor is the surface of water in a vessel. As the image reflected from such a surface represents the object, *e. g.*, your own face, so does your own heart represent the universal heart of man, and you may look into it to study and learn all human nature.——Some interpreters give the proverb a slightly different shade of meaning, thus: Every man is as his own heart. The heart is the index of the man. Look into your own heart and you see your real self.——But the former construction comprehends this. If the heart as you see it in yourself reveals all human hearts, it of course reveals all human character and your own is included. Therefore your own heart reflects the heart of universal man as the surface of water reflects your own face; the face you wear answers to the face you see in the water as your inner heart answers to the heart of man as a race.

20. Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied.

"Hell" [Sheol] and Destruction [Death] stand here for the grave personified to represent the great law of human mortality from which none are exempted. The grave is never sated—is never so full as to be satisfied without more victims. So the eyes of men never see so much that they care to see no more.

21. *As* the fining pot for silver, and the furnace for gold; so *is* a man to his praise.

As the fire of a crucible proves silver and gold, so a man should prove the praises he gets, sifting, scanning them with humble views of himself, and accepting them as true only when in sober reflection he finds them to be so. Or as the sense may be, So will the praise a man gets prove him, revealing his true character. The vain, weak man will be elated and made giddy; the man of solid worth will show it by his bearing under the influence of praise. The choice therefore lies between these two constructions: As the crucible tries silver, so (a) a man should *try* the praises he gets;

or (b) the praise he gets will *try him*. The man in either case corresponds to the crucible; but whether considered in relation to praise as *acting* or as *acted upon* is the question. As to the facts of human nature, the former is what *ought* to be—the latter, what *is*. Neither sense is bad.

22. Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, *yet* will not his foolishness depart from him.

The almost obsolete word "bray" means to bruise, to beat, to maul. The proverb sets forth that a fool sticks to his folly and his folly to him, as if they were mutually parts of each other united by a common affinity. The fool is precisely the man who spurns and withstands all effort to make him wise, *i. e.*, to get his folly out of him.

23. Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, *and* look well to thy herds:

24. For riches *are* not for ever: and doth the crown *endure* to every generation?

25. The hay appeareth, and the tender grass showeth itself, and herbs of the mountains are gathered.

26. The lambs *are* for thy clothing, and the goats *are* the price of the field.

27. And *thou shalt have* goats' milk enough for thy food, for the food of thy household, and *for* the maintenance for thy maidens.

A beautiful commendation of husbandry. Give very careful attention to your flocks and herds, for wealth sought by other means is treacherous; often transient; even crowns are not wont to pass down in long unbroken line from generation to generation.—— Here is also rich beauty as well as utility. The hay is taken off; then springs up the after-math, young, tender, and green; the vegetable growths of the hills are gathered in for the winter. The lambs furnish wool and skins for your clothing; goats are so profitable that you may rely on their price for the purchase of fields; so shall your supplies of food be ample for all your household. An employment which combines such varied pleasure and beauty with so much security against failure, and such supply for man's chief wants of food and clothing, may be commended wisely. The glory of Solomon's kingdom was its agricultural wealth.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

1. The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion.

Conscious guilt makes men fearful. When a man knows he ought to suffer, every rustling leaf is to him the stealthy tread of some mortal foe; every specter is a fiend to curse him.——But the righteous are fearless. An approving conscience and a cheerful trust in God's universal providence conspire to quell all sense of fear. The primary and proper sense of the Hebrew verb rendered "are bold," is to *trust*.——Remarkably, the same language used here respecting the fear and the feeling of the wicked, appears in the threatenings of the Mosaic law against the people whenever they should apostatize from their God. (See Lev. 26: 17, 36).

2. For the transgression of a land many *are* the princes thereof: but by a man of understanding *and* knowledge the state *thereof* shall be prolonged.

While the general sense of this proverb is given in the received version, the more precise thought of the original words might be better put thus: "For the rebellion of a land, its princes are many; but for [because of] wise and knowing men, so shall he [the prince] live long." If the people go into rebellion, they will be cursed with a frequent change of rulers. If they act wisely, their own prince will have a long and prosperous reign. Did Solomon foresee the future destinies of his own people of Israel? His words found abundant illustration in the frequent revolutions of the northern kingdom on the one hand, and in the long and wholesome reigns of various good kings of the southern on the other.

3. A poor man that oppresseth the poor *is like* a sweeping rain which leaveth no food.

A penniless man raised to power (a case not infrequent in oriental countries), and then oppressing the defenseless to enrich himself by merciless exactions, is [in Hebrew] "a sweeping rain and no bread;" *i. e.*, a flood which destroys all the harvests and begets a famine.——In the first clause the Heb. has two quite unlike words where the English has but one—"poor." The *penniless* man that oppresseth the *powerless*," etc.

4. They that forsake the law praise the wicked: but such as keep the law contend with them.

Through a common sympathy, the lawless praise the wicked; but the law-abiding stir up themselves to withstand them. Since bad men will sustain each other against law and order, it behooves the good to combine their efforts on the other side.

5. Evil men understand not judgment: but they that seek the LORD understand all *things.*

Wickedness of heart blinds the eye of the mind so that bad men will not comprehend justice and right. Over against them are those who seek the Lord, and who therefore get all needful wisdom. The proverb implies that the latter only can be trusted to rule well.

6. Better *is* the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than *he that is* perverse *in his* ways, though he *be* rich.

Better for any purpose, and especially better for a ruler, is the poor but upright man than the rich but perverse. Tried, reliable integrity is far above riches as a qualification for either a citizen or a ruler—a sentiment not inappropriate to our own country and times. Solomon says expressively—"than he who perverts his *double* ways," using the dual number to show that his moral ways are changeful, now this, now that—guided by no moral principle.

7. Whoso keepeth the law *is* a wise son: but he that is a companion of riotous *men* shameth his father.

These "riotous men," in the sense of the Hebrew, are not men given to mob violence, but rather, to revelry and gluttony. The same word occurs above, 23: 21, and in Deut. 21: 20. The young man who associates intimately with such prodigals will surely bring his father to shame. It will be a disgrace to any father to have such a son.

8. He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor.

See 13: 22. The retributions of God's providence will appear in the history of great estates. God's infinite justice and his wise regard to human welfare forbid his awarding unmingled and abiding prosperity to men notorious for fraud and oppression. Hence wealth, amassed by usury and unrighteousness, goes into the hands of one who will use it as God designed wealth should be used—to bless the needy. Let his name be praised for this!

9. He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer *shall be* abomination.

If men will not hear God's law, he will not hear their prayer. Refusing to hear his law, they are in actual rebellion against him. Consequently their prayer to him is only an insult, because it is simply asking him not to hurt, but to bless men who are actual persistent rebels against his throne. Their prayer virtually begs permission to go on to sin all they will, and to be exempted from punishment therefor. And God might as well vacate his throne as to hear such prayer propitiously!

10. Whoso causeth the righteous to go astray in an evil way he shall fall himself into his own pit: but the upright shall have good *things* in possession.

"His own pit" is that which he dug for the righteous man, and would fain have enticed him from the paths of virtue into it. (Compare 26: 27.) The upright shall inherit blessings by permanent possession, never subject to such reverses as justly befall the wicked.

11. The rich man *is* wise in his own conceit; but the poor that hath understanding searcheth him out.

The noticeable thing in this proverb is its assumption that rich men are self-conceited. No doubt this is sometimes, perhaps often, true. They are prone to ascribe their success in accumulating wealth to their superior sagacity and wisdom. But it will sometimes happen that a poor man of real thought and deep penetration will search them out in the sense of probing and fathoming the shallowness of their assumed wisdom. Solomon means to say that riches and wisdom are quite unlike; that riches does not necessarily presuppose wisdom; that some rich men may be sadly deficient, not only in profound knowledge, but in that fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of true wisdom; while some poor men may be truly rich in these treasures of the mind and of the heart. Such views are always wholesome, especially in their bearing upon the aspirations of the young.

12. When righteous *men* do rejoice, *there is* great glory: but when the wicked rise, a man is hidden.

It can scarcely be doubted that the sentiment here is substantially the same as in 11: 10 and 29: 2, and also in v. 28, below, *i. e.*, it refers to the relative influence of righteous rulers and of wicked. There is great joy in the former case: in the latter, men are fain to hide themselves away from the common danger. So far from walking abroad in exuberant joy, they are thankful if they may escape with only "dear life."

13. He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh *them* shall have mercy.

*If* men could only cover their sins from the Omniscient One—but they can not! And he will not let their covering of sin avail to their prosperity, even among their fellow-beings, who are not omniscient. But the leading thought is that they shall not prosper *as toward God*. They shall find no mercy from him so long as they cover their sin. It is only by confessing and forsaking that they can find mercy. So it always is: so for the interests of every sinner and of the whole moral universe it ought to be!

14. Happy *is* the man that feareth always: but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief.

See 14: 16. This fear is not the superstitious dread of imaginary evil but the wholesome fear of offending God by sin. O how blessed is he who never loses this solemn fear of displeasing the great and holy God!——On the contrary, he who hardens his heart against such fear and becomes reckless as to sin and its consequences shall surely fall into ruin—the word "mischief" representing here, not some of the lesser evils, but nothing less than destruction.

15. *As* a roaring lion, and a ranging bear; *so is* a wicked ruler over the poor people.

A "ranging bear"—one at large, unrestrained and furious. Such is a wicked ruler over a defenseless people.

16. The prince that wanteth understanding *is* also a great oppressor: *but* he that hateth covetousness shall prolong *his* days.

The difficult point in the original is that the two things said in the first clause, of the prince, viz., (a) that he lacketh understanding; (b) that he is great in oppression; are united not by the verb "is," but by the Heb. word which usually means *and*. Hence Stuart translates: "As to a prince who lacketh understanding and multiplieth oppression—he who hateth covetousness shall prolong his days." He then paraphrases it—"As to the foolish and greedy oppressor, I have only to say that the man of an opposite character shall obtain the blessing of long life." Of course the oppressor can not obtain it.——Ewald makes the clause an exclamation; which would be all right if the author had prefixed a woe, saying "Woe to him who is weak in understanding, but mighty in oppression!"——Most of the commentators translate with our received version. I think the construction proposed by Prof. Stuart, while doing no violence to the Hebrew words, has great force by means of tacitly assuming that the reader must know that such a course cuts short one's days.

17. A man that doeth violence to the blood of *any* person shall flee to the pit; let no man stay him.

Literally this would read—"A man oppressed with life-blood will flee to the pit; let them not lay hold of him." It is plainly the case of the murderer whose conscience is agonized with the sense of his guilt, and who instinctively flies to the grave for relief from tortures more terrible to him than death, seeming to say as he rushes on—Let not the avenging furies seize this murderer!

18. Whoso walketh uprightly shall be saved: but *he that is* perverse *in his* ways shall fall at once.

The last clause better thus: "He who walketh tortuously in double ways shall fall in one" [of them]. No matter which he takes, for both are wrong and he must meet his death in either. The noun for "ways" is in the dual number—in the sense of *double.*

19. He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread: but he that followeth after vain *persons* shall have poverty enough.

"Followeth after" is more strictly *chaseth after*, runs eagerly with them. The antithesis is better preserved by following the original: The one shall have bread enough; the other poverty enough: the one, bread to satiety; the other poverty, also, to his heart's content. The Heb. repeats the same verb.

20. A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent.

According to the original, the "faithful man" is the man of integrity—truthful, sure. He will be great and rich in blessings. But he who makes haste to be rich is supposed to lose this integrity. Solomon does not *say* that he will miss the great blessings spoken of in the first clause, but he does more than to say it: he assumes that it can not possibly be otherwise, and that every reader must see this. He will not be guiltless, and therefore being guilty, he will not be blessed.

21. To have respect of persons *is* not good: for, for a piece of bread *that* man will transgress.

Compare 24: 23 and 18: 5. It is worse than merely "not good;" it is outrageously bad to have respect of persons—to be influenced by favoritism to deny justice to the innocent and to acquit the guilty. The proverb assumes that this evinces an utter want of principle. Such a man would sin for a morsel of bread—so cheap and facile a thing with him is his virtue. He would sell for less than a dish of pottage.

22. He that hasteth to be rich *hath* an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him.

The English margin gives the sense of the original: "The man of evil eye hasteth to be rich," his evil eye implying a distorted view of the value of riches and a heart reckless as to the means of getting them. "Hasteth," in eager anxiety. It does not occur to him that poverty is his doom; that wealth so gotten will "fly away."——The "man of evil eye" appears also in 23: 6.

23. He that rebuketh a man, afterward shall find more favor than he that flattereth with the tongue.

When wise reproof shall have really saved you from ruin, and you come to see it, you will surely thank your reprover. But you can not wisely thank the deceitful flatterer who not merely passes your faults unnoticed, but blinds your eyes to their existence.

24. Whoso robbeth his father or his mother, and saith, *It is* no transgression; the same *is* the companion of a destroyer.

Probably the assumed apology for robbing father and mother is that, being a son, the estate is prospectively his, and he only anticipates the use of what is his own. The proverb declares that such a son is an associate in sympathy and character with a destroyer; ready for robbery or any other foul crime.

25. He that *is* of a proud heart stirreth up strife: but he that putteth his trust in the LORD shall be made fat.

A very perceptible antithesis between the two clauses of this proverb will appear if we give them this shade of meaning: The proud heart naturally begets strife and therefore forbids quietness and pure enjoyment; but he who humbly trusts in the Lord will be enriched with most abundant blessings. The proud man can brook no supposed insult, and therefore will have his hands full of quarrels and of revenge; but he who commits his cause to God as his great Avenger may repose in perpetual peace.——Stirring up strife appears in 15: 18; being "made fat" in 11: 25 and in 13: 4; the general sentiment in 13: 10.

26. He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered.

"Trusting to one's own heart" is following its impulses, the lead of its passions, as opposed to following the wisdom of God. The first clause which, in form, only affirms such an one to be a fool, in fact assumes that this folly will ruin him; while walking in wisdom would insure his deliverance from such ruin.

27. He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse.

"Hiding the eyes" here is closing one's own eyes so as not to see a suffering brother's want and shutting the sympathies of the heart against such appeals. This man shall have many a curse. (See Deut. 15: 7, 8.) The Great Father commits himself to bless those who are with him in loving care for the poor. (See 19: 17 and 29: 7.)

28. When the wicked rise, men hide themselves: but when they perish, the righteous increase.

V. 12 has the same general idea. (See also 29: 2 and 11: 10.)

## CHAPTER XXIX.

1. He, that being often reproved hardeneth *his* neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.

"The man of reproofs" (the form of the Hebrew) is he who has been reproved *much*, and upon whom the power of reproof has been exhausted in vain.——"Hardening the neck" takes its figure from the bullock who resists the yoke and rebels against restraint—a very common figure with the Hebrews. (See Jer. 19: 15 and 7: 26 and 17: 23 and Neh. 9: 29 and Acts 7: 51.)——"Destroyed" is expressed in Hebrew by a very strong verb and in its most intensive form: "*shall be utterly broken to pieces—and no healing!*" When all hope of amendment is gone, judgment without mercy must ensue, for the honor and safety of God's moral universe demand it.

2. When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.

The parallel passages are 28: 12, 28. "When the righteous *flourish*," are in prominent positions and in prosperity. The original does not restrict the case to the holding of public office.

3. Whoso loveth wisdom rejoiceth his father: but he that keepeth company with harlots spendeth *his* substance.

The antithesis implies that the associate of harlots both hates wisdom and brings sorrow upon his father's heart.

4. The king by judgment establisheth the land: but he that receiveth gifts overthroweth it.

The word "land" implies his kingdom, considered as involving the welfare of society. By honest and upright judgment, good order is maintained and every good thing prospers; but a king or judge who receives bribes, subverts all justice and ruins his country.

5. A man that flattereth his neighbor spreadeth a net for his feet.

It is assumed that this flattery [Heb. making the tongue smooth] is practically falsehood. It is easy to see that such flattery, ministering to human pride, will be a snare to any man unless he is very wise or very humble.

6. In the transgression of an evil man *there is* a snare: but the righteous doth sing and rejoice.

A bad man's transgression proves a snare of ruin to him, and

brings him none of the real, substantial joy which is the legitimate lot of the righteous. The antithesis implies the latter point.

7. The righteous considereth the cause of the poor: *but* the wicked regardeth not to know *it.*

"The righteous *knoweth*" [Heb.] and takes pains to know, the case of the weak. The weak are not necessarily the penniless, but rather the friendless and dependent. The wicked man does not seek this knowledge; takes no pains to inform himself as to their case.

8. Scornful men bring a city into a snare: but wise *men* turn away wrath.

Scornful men are probably those who scorn all law, human or divine; the lawless and self-willed. The verb that follows means to blow up [as a fire], and, applied to the minds of men, means to inflame their passions. In this sense they set the city on fire; but the wise allay [Heb. turn back] wrath.

9. *If* a wise man contendeth with a foolish man, whether he rage or laugh, *there is* no rest.

The words "if" and "there is" are not represented in the original.——"A wise man *litigates* with a fool," the verb referring legitimately to proceedings before a court of justice. We must at least give it the sense of a grave discussion of some important matter in issue between the parties.——The proverb proceeds to say, "He will rage and he will laugh"—both by turns—"but there will be no rest." *Which* of the two will rage and laugh? Commentators differ singularly on this point, some assuming that this is said of the wise man; others that it is said of the fool. I accept the latter construction, referring it to the fool, who, in this discussion, will either fly into a passion, or treat the case with ridicule and laughter; never with calm, dispassionate consideration; never with candor and honesty, in the absence of all undue excitement; never in a state of mind well put here as one of *rest*, *i. e.*, from the agitations of passion and folly.

10. The bloodthirsty hate the upright: but the just seek his soul.

Bloody men hate the upright by a natural repugnance, fearing justice from their hands. It seems to be implied that these men of blood would gladly take the life of the upright; while on the contrary, just men seek to save *his* life, *i. e.*, the same life which the men of blood seek to destroy. To "seek the soul" is here not to destroy life but to save.

11. A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise *man* keepeth it in till afterwards.

I understand this proverb to refer, not so much to thoughts

as to the feelings, passions. The Hebrew word requires this shade of meaning. A fool throws out [Heb. causes to come forth] all his spirit; * all the impulses of his passions and excited feelings. The wise man represses his feelings; turns their current backward. This verb occurs Ps. 89: 9, "When the waves of the sea arise, thou *stillest* them." The proverb contrasts the wise and the fool in the point of self-control of passion. Compare 12: 16.

12. If a ruler hearken to lies, all his servants *are* wicked.

If a ruler bend his open ears to falsehood, he will have servants enough to fill those ears. His influence will corrupt them. They will be ready enough to gratify him with the lies he loves to hear.

13. The poor and the deceitful man meet together: the LORD lighteneth both their eyes.

The English margin has the true sense: *usurer*, and not "flatterer." The poor and the usurer, the man oppressed and the man who oppresses him, come in contact face to face—perhaps the thought is, into unpleasant collision; but let them both remember that they owe the light of life, and by consequence, all the blessings of their existence, to the same omniscient and righteous Lord. The same sentiment appears in 22: 2.——The sense of his relations to God as the author of his being and of all his blessings will make the poor man patient and trustful; the usurer, mindful of his responsibilities and of his duty toward his poor brother.

14. The king that faithfully judgeth the poor, his throne shall be established forever.

As usual, the "poor" are here the weak, the defenseless—the very class for whom God provides the protection of civil law. Therefore when the king meets the ends for which God ordains human government, God will establish his throne.——The strain of Ps. 72 applies this doctrine to King Messiah. Indeed its full development can be had only in him. No other king ever reaches the perfection of just ruling; the throne of none other shall be established literally *forever*.

15. The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left *to himself* bringeth his mother to shame.

A child *let loose* [literally, "sent abroad"] will bring shame upon his mother, the naming of the mother in this case being perhaps a suggestion that she rather than the father is under special temptation to this fault, and is pre-eminently the sufferer from it. —— Solomon believes in vigorous and effective discipline for the young —a truly wise man! (See 13: 24 and 23: 13.)

16. When the wicked are multiplied, transgression increaseth: but the righteous shall see their fall.

Crime will naturally increase with the numerical increase of wicked men, for they will override the public sentiment of the good and the restraining force of law. But let not the righteous lose hope and heart, for the triumphing of the wicked is short. They shall live to see the wicked fall.

17. Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul.

Due correction, the efficient moral training of children, will bring to the parent's heart the fruits of joy and rest in the end.

18. Where *there is* no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy *is* he.

This word "vision" is one of the two most common words for prophetic vision—revelations made expressly from God to inspired men, and through them to the people. The meaning here seems to be that where there is no vision from God revealing and enforcing man's moral duty, there the people will become lawless and dissolute. Such will, of course, altogether miss the blessedness of those who keep the law.——For the usage of the verb rendered "perish"* see Ex. 32: 25 and 2 Chron. 28: 19. In both these passages it is very imperfectly rendered, "made naked;" while the true sense is, *had demoralized*, made dissolute and lawless.——The proverb is a rich testimony to the practical value of a revelation from God of man's moral duty and of the sanctions of the divine law.

19. A servant will not be corrected by words: for though he understand he will not answer.

This servant is peristently disobedient, obstinate, mulish. "Though he may understand:" [Heb.] "no answer." The doctrine of the proverb is that some appliances, more stern than words, are demanded. Of course Solomon assumes that right and reason are on the side of the master and not on the side of the servant—that servants have duties, and have no excuse for stubbornly refusing to perform them.

20. Seest thou a man *that is* hasty in his words? *there is* more hope of a fool than of him.

The very same thing is said of him who is wise in his own conceit (26: 12). The man "hasty of words" speaks without previous and preliminary thinking. He who will not think before he speaks might as well have no thinking power, *i. e.*, be a fool.

21. He that delicately bringeth up his servant from a child shall have him become *his* son at the length.

In this proverb the important word in each clause is one of rare

* פָּרַע

occurrence. In the first clause, the verb means, to fondle, to pet, to treat with indiscriminate indulgence. The word rendered "son" is found only here. Some give it the sense of a dissolute, lawless one; but the current of critical opinion sets strongly in favor of the sense *son.*

22. An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression.

See 15: 18 and 26: 21. "A furious man" is precisely a man fully possessed with the spirit of wrath, over whom it has supreme control. He will be abundant in transgression.

23. A man's pride shall bring him low: but honor shall uphold the humble in spirit.

The humble of spirit shall *take hold of* honor—shall attain it. This seems to be the sense of the Hebrew verb and corresponds well with the first clause. Pride brings a man low in general esteem; humility raises him high.

24. Whoso is partner with a thief hateth his own soul: he heareth cursing, and bewrayeth *it* not.

He who shares the stolen goods with the thief is reckless of his soul; acts as if he hated it, and was ready to bring on himself damnation. (See 8: 36.) He is put under oath to testify according to the Levitical law (Lev. 5: 1), and yet refuses to bring out the active partner in the transaction. The law referred to provides that "if a soul shall hear the voice of swearing," *i. e.*, the solemn adjuration of the officer of justice, binding him before God to testify to the crime "whether he hath seen it or known it," and attaching the awful penalty—"If he do not utter it, then he shall bear his iniquity;" there is no pardon for him. —— Judg. 17: 2 gives a historic case of this sort of adjuration.

25. The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.

The fear of man in the sense of an undue solicitude to please and fear to displease men, becomes a snare into sin. Only those who trust in the Lord are safe, on high above this snare. They are safe because they fear God far more than man, and trust in him for protection and for all needful blessings. Consequently they have no occasion to feel sensitively and excessively dependent on the favor of men.

26. Many seek the ruler's favor; but *every* man's judgment *cometh* from the LORD.

Many seek the face of the ruler to obtain judgment in their own favor; but the ultimate decision in every case is from the Lord. His universal providence gives shape to even the earthly destiny

of man; much more to his eternal reward. Therefore let men seek the ruler's favor far less and God's far more—for their well-being both here and hereafter.

27. An unjust man *is* an abomination to the just: and *he that is* upright in the way *is* abomination to the wicked.

The bad and the good have a mutual dislike, not to say abhorrence of each other. The just abhor the unjust because they hate and loathe wickedness.——On the other hand the wicked dislike the upright, whose very name and presence rebuke them; whose influence annoys them and perhaps even frustrates their wicked schemes and brings them to just punishment. There never can be any common sympathy between men of morally opposite character.

## CHAPTER XXX.

This chapter and the next are not ascribed to Solomon; but this to Agur and the next to Lemuel and his mother. In this chapter the style and general manner are peculiar and unique, quite unlike any thing we have from the pen of Solomon. The writer brings forward his points *in groups*. Two things he prays for (vs. 7–9); a series of four "generations" have their very distinctive qualities (vs. 11–14); four things are insatiable (vs. 15, 16); three, yea four things are very wonderful and not easily traced out (vs. 18, 19)); another group of three or four bring upon society intolerable disquiet (vs. 21–23); another group of four things are each small but very wise (vs. 24–28); a closing group of three or four are stately in their movements (vs. 29–31). Some proverbs disconnected and apparently independent of these groups are interspersed occasionally between them.

In regard to the author of this chapter; his time; his country—in general, his history, nothing is certainly known. I see no valid reason to concur with those who make Agur a symbolic name for Solomon, meaning the collector, *i. e.*, of proverbs.

1. The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, *even* the prophecy: the man spake unto Ithiel, even unto Ithiel and Ucal,

The great body of commentators concur with the received version in making the words, "Jakeh," "Ithiel," "Ucal," proper names, yet of persons whose history is now utterly lost. A few critics [Prof. Moses Stuart, and before him Hitzig and Bertheau] take these words, not as proper nouns but as common nouns or

verbs, and therefore give an entirely different construction to v. 1. Stuart translates the verse: "The words of Agur, the son of her who was obeyed in Massa. Thus spake the man: I have toiled for God, I have toiled for God, and have ceased." He takes Massa to be a province in Southern Arabia, near Dumah, both these names appearing among the sons of Ishmael (Gen. 25: 14 and 1 Chron. 1: 30), and therefore probably, like the names of his other sons, becoming subsequently the names of tribes and countries in vast Arabia. A scrap of stray history appears in 1 Chron. 4: 39–43, showing that in the days of Hezekiah five hundred Simeonites made a raid upon Southern Arabia; found a rich country; drove out the ancient Amalekites and held possession of their lands. This being in the same region with the supposed countries of Dumah and Massa, it is assumed that Agur lived in this remote Hebrew colony.——I see no insuperable objections to this view. The considerations in favor of it are—(1.) That the received version has too much introduction—too many of the usual formulæ of opening an oriental treatise; "the words of;" "the prophecy;" "the saying of the man," etc. We have no other instance of three distinct announcements for an introduction. One only is the rule.——(2.) It is slightly improbable that we should have such a group of proper names with no clue to their history.——(3.) In the construction proposed by Prof. Stuart, we have a natural and pertinent connection of thought between the first verse and the second. In v. 2, the word rendered "surely"* should be read *for*, introducing the reason for something previously stated. This normal sense of the word is provided for thus: "I have toiled to know God; I have labored even to weariness to find out God—and have desisted: *for* [v. 2] I am very stupid intellectually and very ignorant, etc.——(4.) The construction requires no change in the consonants of the original. The vowels only and the division into words are changed.——(5.) The most ancient versions are conflicting; the Chaldee and Syriac translators and the Masoretic punctuators make the words in dispute proper nouns, while the Septuagint and Vulgate make them common nouns.——On the other hand, the great objections lying against Prof. Stuart's construction are the harshness of the circumlocution—"the son of her who was obeyed in Massa;" and the authority of so many of the most ancient witnesses.——In conclusion, I am inclined to regard this construction of Prof. S. as perhaps admissible, yet not sustained by decisive authority. I do not find data which suffice to put the question beyond reasonable doubt. Fortunately the point has no vital importance, since it affects but slightly the course of thought, and not at all the inspired authority of the chapter.

2. Surely I *am* more brutish than *any* man, and have not the understanding of a man.

כִּי*

3. I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy.

The author declares that his effort to find out the Almighty to perfection had been unsuccessful, and he here confesses his ignorance and incapacity. Probably these expressions must be attributed jointly to his great (perhaps excessive) modesty and to the fact that he has been pushing his inquiries, not so much into questions of practical duty, nor into the practical aspects of the divine character, as into those deep things of God which no human mind can fathom.

4. Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what *is* his name, and what *is* his son's name, if thou canst tell?

Who has gone up into heaven and then come down again [so the Hebrew runs] that he may show us those deep things of God which no human eye from our earthly stand-point can reach?—— The questions that follow contemplate God as seen in the glory and majesty of his works of creation. Most appropriately does frail, feeble man look forth upon the vastness of these works and ask—*Who* has wrought them? *What* can I learn of his name, *i. e.*, of his nature and of the great depths of his being, his wisdom and his power?

5. Every word of God *is* pure: he *is* a shield unto them that put their trust in him.

6. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.

If this great God, the Maker of all things, so manifestly wise and good, shall deign to speak to mortals, we may be very sure that every word he utters will be pure. See that thou add nothing to his words lest he reprove thee and convict thee of representing him falsely. How canst thou presume to add words of thine own to the words of the great God and then to claim for them his sanction as if thou wert no less wise than he?——Moreover, since this great God proffers himself to us as our protector and invites our filial trust and confidence in him, we may certainly assume that his protection will be most ample, a perfect shield to all who put their trust in him.

7. Two *things* have I required of thee; deny me *them* not before I die:

8. Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me:

9. Lest I be full, and deny *thee*, and say, Who *is* the

LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God *in vain.*

Agur prays for two things: (1.) Put vanity and lies far from my heart; let my spirit never be polluted, even in the sight of God, with falsehood; and, (2.) Of earthly good let me have a simple competence—no more, no less. Not more, lest becoming sated and over-fed, I lose the sense of my dependence upon God, and say in guilty pride—Who is the Lord? And what do I need from him? And not less, lest becoming impoverished I should be tempted to steal, and so should dishonor the name of God; literally, "take it up roughly," irreverently. This last point may perhaps refer to the custom of putting men under oath to testify respecting a theft in respect to which they are supposed to be directly or indirectly implicated. Or it may be assumed that theft naturally leads on to the profaning of God's name.——"Deny me them not before I die" does not mean (in the original) Let them be granted me at some one point somewhere in my future life; but this—Let me never be denied them throughout all my remaining life. Deny them not to me while yet I shall not have died, *i. e.*, shall yet live.

10. Accuse not a servant unto his master, lest he curse thee, and thou be found guilty.

All servants by reason of their dependent condition should be commiserated. At least their case should be treated with careful consideration. Therefore never slander a servant to his master, lest he curse thee, and lest, investigation ensuing, thou be found guilty.

11. *There is* a generation *that* curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother.

12. *There is* a generation *that are* pure in their own eyes, and *yet* is not washed from their filthiness.

13. *There is* a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! and their eye-lids are lifted up.

14. *There is* a generation, whose teeth *are as* swords, and their jaw-teeth *as* knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from *among* men.

Four classes are next named, briefly described, and obviously held up to universal detestation: those who curse father and mother [*not* to bless is equivalent to curse]; the proud and self-conceited; the haughty and scornful; and the malicious and savagely cruel. Let the reader abhor these "generations;" let those who bear either of these characters receive our righteous and unmitigated reprobation!

15. The horse-leech hath two daughters, *crying,* Give, give. There are three *things that* are never satisfied, *yea,* four *things* say not, *It is* enough:

16. The grave; and the barren womb; the earth *that* is not filled with water; and the fire *that* saith not, *It is* enough.

The word rendered "horse-leech," occurs here only. Obviously he is a specimen of insatiability. Critics mostly agree that the word represents the *vampire*—a fiction of ancient mythology, supposed to frequent the desert and fasten upon its victims by night to suck their blood. Its two daughters may represent its organs for drawing blood.——With this ideal conception the writer compares four other insatiable things, as in v. 16. He does not make any moral application of this group of things that are never satisfied, but seems to rest with grouping them together to illustrate each other.

17. The eye *that* mocketh at *his* father, and despiseth to obey *his* mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it.

This is a strong way of expressing a terrible truth, viz.: that God will bring condign and exemplary retribution upon those who proudly insult and scornfully disobey their parents.

18. There be three *things which are* too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not:

19. The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid.

This group seems to be wonderful in respect to leaving no trace of their path behind them.

20. Such *is* the way of an adulterous woman; she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness.

Eating and then wiping the mouth are figures of speech. The real thing intended is the crime which her name indicates and which she would fain conceal by denial.

21. For three *things* the earth is disquieted, and for four *which* it can not bear:

22. For a servant when he reigneth; and a fool when he is filled with meat;

23. For an odious *woman* when she is married; and a handmaid that is heir to her mistress.

The four things grouped here are specially irritating and unendurable. All are in their nature *social* evils.——The servant is unfit to be a king—can not be supposed to have the requisite qualifications. Consequently his administration will be intolerable.——

Quite analogous is the case of a handmaid who becomes heir to her mistress. Very few can bear a great fortune, falling to them suddenly.——The moral instruction in this series as in several of the others is conveyed mainly in the *grouping*—in the bringing of various things together, some of which the reader is supposed to understand well, and the rest he may infer to be of like sort.

24. There be four *things which are* little upon the earth, but they *are* exceeding wise:
25. The ants *are* a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer;
26. The conies *are but* a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks;
27. The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands;
28. The spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings' palaces.

Over against the group of human follies which grievously disquiet the earth and which society can not well bear, there appears here a group of four things distinguished for being small but eminently wise, sagacious.——Critics have sought diligently to identify these little animals. There is no doubt as to the "ant" and the "locust." But the coney [*i. e.*, rabbit] and the "spider" have involved much discussion and difference of opinion. The question turns upon the etymology of the original word; the voice of the earliest versions; the testimony of the cognate languages, especially the Arabic, still a living tongue; and the present natural history of these animals in those countries. Judging from these sources of evidence, modern critics mostly agree that the coney [rabbit] is not the animal designated here, but that he is either the mountain rat [some say mouse] or a somewhat larger animal, known in scientific zoology as the "Hyrax Syriacus," found at this day in those countries, about the size of the rabbit; yet not like him adapted to burrowing in the ground, but living in the clefts of the rocks.——For similar reasons the "spider" is rejected, and the *house-lizard* takes his place as the animal spoken of here. It has organs much resembling the human hand with which it seizes upon house-flies and spiders as its prey and its food.——The remarkable instincts of this group of small animals constitute their special peculiarity. Each in his way seems to be "exceeding wise." In these respects they suggest what man might do if he were to give himself earnestly to the study and the practice of the wisdom for which God has given him the capacity.

29. There be three *things* which go well, yea, four are comely in going:
30. A lion, *which is* strongest among beasts, and turneth not away for any;

31. A grey-hound; a he-goat also; and a king, against whom *there is* no rising up.

This group of four is distinguished for stately movement. —— The word rendered "grey-hound" (literally, one compassed or girded about as to the loins), not being a proper name but a description, has given occasion to much diversity of opinion; *e. g.*, the grey-hound; the zebra; the war-horse; and the wrestler. I doubt if the data accessible to us are sufficient to decide this question with absolute certainty.——The moral lesson, if any, in this group of stately travelers is by no means obvious. Perhaps it looks toward the thought in the verses that follow.

32. If thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thyself, or if thou hast thought evil, *lay* thy hand upon thy mouth.

If thou hast sought to distinguish thyself by a lofty and stately bearing before thy fellows, and in this hast done foolishly or hast had a malign intent—"hand to mouth," the silence of modest humility best becomes thee. Give no utterance to the evil thought; no outward development to the evil deed.

33. Surely the churning of milk bringeth forth butter, and the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood: so the forcing of wrath bringeth forth strife.

The decided self-control indicated by laying the hand upon the mouth is strongly recommended and enforced by the well known law which is so finely put here in triple illustration: The violent agitation of milk brings butter; the wringing of the nose, blood; and a similar rough treatment of man's sensibilities to anger fires up mad strife.——This running comment assumes a logical connection between the four things noted for stately going (vs. 28–31); the putting on of proud and haughty airs; the admonition against it appended (v. 32): and this final enforcement of the admonition in v. 33.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

1. The words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him.

This chapter, as well as the preceding, is unique and unlike the first twenty-nine of this book. It comes not from Solomon, but from a certain king Lemuel and his mother, of whom nothing fur-

ther is certainly known. It is in two parts, vs. 1–9 being a wise mother's counsels to her son with reference to his responsibilities and duties as king; while vs. 10–31 recite the qualities and praises of a virtuous woman. The same mother's hand may be supposed to have originated both parts of this interesting chapter.——This latter portion of twenty-two verses is an acrostic on the Hebrew alphabet, each successive verse commencing with the successive letters of this alphabet—a method due, we may suppose, jointly to the current literary taste and to its actual value as an aid to the memory.

2. What, my son? and what, the son of my womb? and what, the son of my vows?

These questions and repetitions must be understood as the natural expression of strong maternal affection. What shall I say to thee, O my beloved son? How can I express all the interest I feel in thy future course of life, in the virtue and the wisdom with which thou shalt meet the responsibilities and withstand the temptations incident to a youthful prince ascending his throne.—— "The son of my vows" finds a pertinent illustration in the mother of Samuel (1 Sam. 1: 11).

3. Give not thy strength unto women, nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings.

That this admonition has not only a place but *the first* place in this series of maternal counsels is due, not to her lack of modesty, but to her superior discernment, her searching knowledge of human nature, and her just apprehension of the dangers incident even in that age to the almost unlimited facilities of indulgence which accompanied royalty, often to the premature enervation and too speedy ruin of kings.

4. *It is* not for kings, O Lemuel, *it is* not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink:

5. Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted.

6. Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine to those that be of heavy hearts.

7. Let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.

The next danger is from wine. Most expressively does she say —"It is not for kings to drink wine:" this indulgence, this form of excitement, is for every reason unbecoming and unfitting to one who bears the responsibilities of a throne. Men who drink wine will surely increase their own danger of forgetting the law and perverting their own administration of justice. How admirably does she assume that her son is raised to the throne, not to reach

higher facilities for self-indulgence, but to bear worthily a higher class of responsibilities; to rule under God for the protection and vindication of human rights, especially the rights of the weak and afflicted! Noble woman! Our hearts instinctively honor thee for these admirable sentiments, so worthily put in fitting words!

Strong drink may have its uses *for medicine.* It may be useful to rally the waning vitality of one just perishing [Heb.], or it may bring an oblivion of grief to the bitter of soul. If there are cases of extremest wretchedness in which it is better to drown sorrow at the expense even of drowning sober thought and the conscious self-possession of one's intellectual and moral faculties, then let strong drink go to their relief! But whoever can bear the ills of life with manly heroism, or better, with Christian resignation, let him never seek oblivion of his sorrows in the maddening cup!——But alas for those who claim for themselves the privileges and prerogatives of being all their days "ready to perish!" How little of manhood is shortly left to them!

8. Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction.

9. Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.

Let the king deem it his first glory that God has given him a mouth to plead effectually for those who are dumb as to pleading for themselves.——"Such as are appointed to destruction," is literally [in Hebrew] *all the sons of bereavement, i. e.*, the orphans who have no father and no mother to plead in their behalf. So in the next verse, "the poor and the needy" comprise all those classes who are defenseless against oppression, and for whom therefore the great Father provides the protection of civil law and the power of righteous kings.

10. Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price *is* far above rubies.

Here opens an admirable portrait of a model woman. Of course the picture is laid amid the scenes of oriental life and adapts itself to the usages of those times. Yet every-where we have the qualities of industry, diligence, devotion to the duties of her sphere, love and esteem for her husband, care of her family, and, to crown the whole, the spirit of kindness toward all and of true piety toward God.——"Virtuous" is here in a somewhat broader sense than simply moral purity, connubial chastity. It is rather the old Roman sense of *virtus*—energy, capability—describing the woman who fills every sphere of her duty capably and nobly. Where will you find such a woman? Her price is above rubies.

11. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil.

12. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.

The heart of her husband can safely trust her *in all respects*—not only in her love and fidelity—though these are painfully rare qualities in oriental households—but in the management of property, in the economy and frugality of her household. The latter is the point specially in mind here. Her husband will feel no need of spoil; good management will insure to him ample supplies for all family wants without resorting to the freebooter's robbery. Such a wife is a richer treasure than a great estate.

13. She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands.

She looks after wool and flax—all the clothing of the household in those ages being of domestic and really *home* manufacture. Pertinently it is said of her, "She worketh with the willingness of her hands" [Heb.], implying perhaps both a cheerful alacrity and that energy which we call "working *with a will*."

14. She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar.

She acquaints herself with the best sources of supply, and therefore knows where to get the best provisions at the lowest cost, like the merchant vessels which bring valuable products from far where they can be furnished best and cheapest. Fine business qualities are these of the oriental housewife!

15. She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens.

Early rising was in those times and countries universal, save with the professional sluggard. This matron rises while yet it is night, and breakfast is over ere the day calls men to their labor.

16. She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard.

One of the last things we should expect in such a list appears here. She studies the value and capabilities of a field and then proceeds to buy it. It is intimated (v. 23) that her husband is a man of public responsibilities, one of the elders of the land, sitting in court—the place where judicial proceedings were held. Hence she relieves him, it would seem, as much as possible from the cares of business, not only within doors but without.——"With the fruit of her hands, she planteth a vineyard." It is not said, with her own hands, but rather with the results of her labor elsewhere applied.

17. She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms.

She does not shrink from such use of her physical strength as naturally gives more strength. In her view, weakness was not among the womanly virtues.

18. She perceiveth that her merchandise *is* good: her candle goeth not out by night.

The original suggests the idea of *taste*. She has the good taste, *i. e.*, judgment to see that the things she buys are the best of their kind.

19. She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff.

This was before the days of cotton mills and machinery. The mothers and daughters must have had incessant occupation.

20. She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.

By a beautiful correspondence of ideas she not only puts forth her hand to the spindle and the distaff, but also as a "helping-hand" to the poor and the needy. Her heart is large. Its sympathies and cares reach out far beyond her own household.

21. She is not afraid of the snow for her household; for all her household *are* clothed with scarlet.

Some of the critics plead strongly for the reading which appears in the margin of the English Bible: "clothed," not with scarlet, but "with *double garments*." This forms the Hebrew word from another root, but with better sense. For what has a scarlet color to do with protection against snow and cold? But double clothing as against cold and snow is entirely in place.

22. She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing *is* silk and purple.

The word for "coverings of tapestry" naturally means bed-covering.

23. Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land.

Her husband is no sluggard; no cypher in the world. His place of being known is not in the street-corners nor in the dram-shops, but "in the gates," where all courts were held and all public business transacted. There he makes his presence felt.

24. She maketh fine linen, and selleth *it;* and delivereth girdles unto the merchants.

She not only manufactures the clothing necessary for her household, but some for export as well. By this means she is able,

like the merchant ships, to bring her food (some of it) "from far" (v. 14).

25. Strength and honor *are* her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come.

Clad with strength and honor, she laughs [Heb.] at the terrors of the future. She fears no such evils as famine or winter. So fully is she prepared for emergencies that she knows no anxiety as to future wants. She looks only with joy into the future.

26. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue *is* the law of kindness.

It is only what we should expect from so much practical good sense in her business that her speech would be with words of wisdom. It testifies to the wealth of her heart's love for all that in her tongue is "the law of kindness." She lives to make others blessed, even all who come within the range of her influence.

27. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.

These are comprehensive statements, summing up the numerous particulars already given.

28. Her children arise up, and call her blessed: her husband *also*, and he praiseth her.

"Arise up" to make their testimony the more emphatic and impressive. They pronounce her blessed—worthy of honor and of praise—worthy of the joy that comes by reaction from so much well-doing. Her husband has abundant cause to join in these testimonials to her princely worth.

29. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.

The character here described is a paragon of womanly virtues. While others have done well, she excels them all.

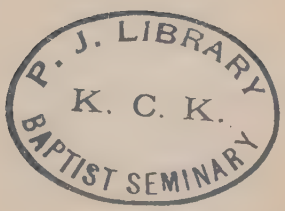
30. Favor *is* deceitful, and beauty *is* vain: *but* a woman *that* feareth the LORD, she shall be praised.

"Favor" appropriately means grace of person, and probably, here, of manner. Stuart gives it "loveliness." These qualities of person are deceptive and more or less transient; but qualities that lie in the heart, and especially those of true piety, have enduring value and deserve unqualified commendation.

31. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.

The best critics take the word rendered "give" from a root which may mean to *praise*. Praise her according to the fruit of

her hands. Let all her works praise her in the great assembly of the people.——The moral bearing of such an example, so beautifully commended, must have been eminently wholesome in those ancient times. It is scarcely less so in our age, although the modes of domestic life and labor have so greatly changed. The same qualities of massive goodness; the same capabilities for filling perfectly her domestic sphere; the same words of wisdom in her mouth and the same law of kindness on her tongue, are never out of order—must be in every age the cardinal elements of woman's power and of woman's worth. The verdict of the good through all ages goes unanimously to the praise of such mothers of mankind.



# ECCLESIASTES.

## INTRODUCTION.

No one of the canonical books of the Bible has been interpreted more variously than this. No one has seemed to tax the skill of the best critics more severely. This diversity of views has not been limited to the exposition of particular passages, but has reached the fundamental questions of authorship and date, the object of the author in his book, and the manner in which he aims to accomplish it. While many have accepted the testimony of the book itself that Solomon was the author, some have utterly denied this, attributing it to an unknown writer subsequent to the restoration—in the age of Ezra, or of Malachi, or even of the Maccabees. And in regard to the character of the book, some have accounted it a philosophical essay on the chief good of man; others, a record of the actual experiences of the author and of his varying moods of thought and feeling; while yet another class have in a sort combined these two theories, supposing that the author aims to teach, first what is, then what is not, man's highest good, and how to insure and not to miss it, drawing largely from his own experience as well as from the wide range of his personal observation.——Critics have also held opposite opinions on the question whether the author expresses skeptical views as to the future life and the moral government of God in this; and if so, whether he states them as his own convictions or as the sentiments of a supposed objector.

It will be readily seen that some of these points affect not merely

the critical but the popular mind and serve to make the perusal of this book perplexing and unsatisfactory. Yet all critics agree that the book is truly a part of the Jewish sacred Scriptures, received into their canon by the same authority as other books and indorsed by Christ and his Apostles with their divine sanction. There can therefore be not the least doubt that the book, legitimately interpreted, is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3: 16.) Can it be so interpreted as to bring out its inherent moral power and redeem it from dangerous or at least damaging misapprehension?——It is a delicate, not to say difficult, undertaking. I approach it with diffidence, yet with the hope that the conclusions which have proved in the main satisfactory to myself will also prove to be somewhat so to others.——My views differ in some respects widely from those of many able critics, some of whom (*e. g.*, Stuart and Hengstenberg) are evangelical, but most of whom are neological. Of their opinions it behooves me to speak respectfully, and of my own not dogmatically. I do not propose in these notes to controvert the opinions of others extensively, but rather to present my own with only brief allusions to the views and arguments of those from whom I differ, deeming this method best adapted to promote the interest and profit of the class for whom I write.

It will be useful to the reader to study with care the following points which belong naturally to an introduction:

I. The Author.

II. The theme and special aim of the book.

III. The style or dialect.

IV. The author's alleged skepticism.

V. His alleged epicureanism, in commending "mirth" and present enjoyment.

VI. The practical value of the book for the age when it was written and for all ages.

I. The Author.—I accept the testimony of the book as to its author, and hold that it was written by Solomon. His name is not given, but he is described so fully and precisely as to preclude all doubt. The author was a "son of David and king in Jerusalem" (v. 1); was "king over Israel in Jerusalem" (chap. 1: 12). Solomon is the only man in whom these conditions meet. And there

is no apparent reason why the omission of his name should prejudice his claim of authorship. He may have had reasons for this omission, some of which may be suggested in the sequel. Yet further, the entire current of Jewish tradition sustains his authorship. Both Stuart and Hengstenberg, though they deny that Solomon was the author, admit that the voice of the early Jewish and Christian fathers down to the sixteenth century is unanimous for Solomon. This testimony of the Jewish fathers, running back nearly or quite to the age of the compilers of the canon, should have great weight.

Moreover, the account which the author gives of the salient points of his life (chap. 2: 4–10) identifies him as being really Solomon. "I made me great works; I builded me houses," etc.; "I gathered me silver and gold; I was great and increased more than all" [not merely all kings but all men] "that were before me in Jerusalem." Those who deny that Solomon wrote the book find themselves compelled to admit that the speaker here is Solomon—introduced as they suppose by the writer to say these things and then withdraw. But according to the book this "I" is the author himself.

It should be noted that the opening statement of the book is one of the usual forms in which the Hebrew writers introduce themselves to their readers and claim authorship. "*The words of the preacher*, the son of David, king in Jerusalem." So we have "*The words of Jeremiah*," etc. (Jer. 1: 1); "*The words of Amos*" (Amos 1: 1). Hence there can be no doubt that the writer intended to represent himself to be Solomon. The reference to his preëminent wisdom and to his "setting in order many proverbs" (chap. 12: 9) bears toward the same result. Throughout the entire range of Jewish history Solomon stands forth preëminent for wisdom and the only Jewish author known to the world as "setting in order many proverbs."——All these points concur to show that the writer claimed to be Solomon, and therefore prove either that he was Solomon and said these things in honest truth of himself, or was a pretender, trying to pass himself off for what he was not; in other words, an impostor. The latter alternative is to my mind exceedingly revolting.——The fact that Solomon styles himself "the preacher" (Heb. "Coheleth") bears not at all against his being the author. The best criticism sustains this sense of the Hebrew word, given even by the translator of the

Septuagint who translates "*Ecclesiastes*"—one who addresses a public assembly—a preacher.—By the use of this term he meant to indicate that in this book he appears, not in his usual and well known character, of a king on his throne; not as a monarch on the tribunal of justice, but simply a preacher of moral truth. He comes forth with a moral purpose, to exhort his fellow-men to desist from seeking their supreme good in sensual enjoyment. He comes to reason with them of "righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come." He lays off for the time his robes of royalty, and is simply a *preacher*. The term therefore is eminently appropriate for Solomon's use to designate his purpose and character in this book.

I am well aware that the authorship of Solomon has been boldly denied, and that this denial has been defended with much learning and by arguments which, if not irrelevant, must be admitted to have weight.——The main arguments are drawn from two sources: (1.) The dialect in which the book is written; and (2.) The incidental allusions to existing circumstances, *e. g.*, unjust rulers; governmental oppression; a state of public calamity and of general despondency. Those who deny that Solomon was the author claim that on both these grounds the book could not have been written by him, since neither its dialect nor the historical facts which it assumes to be then existing belong to his age. These main points will receive attention in their place. A few minor points may be disposed of briefly here.

Hengstenberg boldly takes the strongest ground, saying, "The book of Ecclesiastes was not only *not* composed by Solomon, but does not even pretend to have been" (pp. 44 and 8). This assertion may be left to the reader's good sense. Any one can see what the author of the book does say of himself.——It need not surprise us that after this assertion, Hengstenberg should suggest that when the author wrote (chap. 1: 12) "I, the preacher, was king over Israel," he "forgot himself," *i. e.*, it slipped his mind for the moment that he was only to personate and act the part of Solomon, and so, unconsciously, he virtually said, "I *am* Solomon." But is it entirely legitimate for an interpreter to assume that his author did not know what he said, and did not say what he meant, or at least *ought* to have meant?——Prof. Stuart avers that it can not be Solomon who says (1: 12), "I *was* king in Jerusalem," because the tense of "was" implies past time merely to the exclusion

of present, *i. e.*, I *was* but am not now. Solomon was king till his death, and therefore could not have said, "I *was* king." But this is a very extraordinary mistake for such a critic as Prof. Stuart, since it is a well settled principle that this Hebrew preter tense often implies past time coming down to and including the present. I was and am still. Indeed Prof. S. himself, in this very commentary, declares and applies this principle, and refers to the grammar in proof of it. (See his comment on chap. 3: 15, on p. 179, and on chap. 6: 10, p. 235.) Besides, if there were some force instead of none at all in this criticism of his, what should forbid the sense—I *was* king when I made the experiments in pleasure-seeking to which I now call your attention? Just now I am rather the preacher than the king.——Again, he says, "How strange that Solomon should tell his readers that he was king in Jerusalem," a fact that every body would know. But this objection disappears when you admit the fact that Solomon wrote, or at least may have written, not for his Hebrew subjects only or even chiefly, but for people in outlying countries and onward in coming ages—a fact of which the book affords very strong if not conclusive proof.——When Solomon says (1: 16), "I acquired more wisdom than all who were in Jerusalem before me," Prof. S. assumes that he must compare himself with kings only, of whom there was but one—David. But what forbids that he should compare himself with all *men*? And how much is the matter helped on his own hypothesis, which is that some unknown writer in the age of Ezra or Malachi put these words in the mouth of Solomon?——Again, he objects that it was not *modest* for Solomon to speak of his own wisdom as he does in chap. 1: 16 and 2: 9, 15, 19.——Perhaps it was not. It is not essential that we should vindicate his modesty. Yet the fact of his superior wisdom was so prominent and so universally admitted, and withal being somewhat vital to his argument in the present case, perhaps his offense is not unpardonable. Or rather, perhaps it ought not to bear seriously against his being the author of this book.——The various allusions to oppressive and unjust rulers and to egregious misgovernments, Prof. S. thinks could not have come from Solomon because no such evils were then present among his people; or if they were so, he could and should have corrected them himself at once. But if Solomon wrote for readers in other countries, this objection becomes irrelevant. There was always misgovernment enough existing in those heathen tribes and

nations. Moreover, it is not altogether clear that there was not some ground for complaint against Solomon himself in the latter years of his reign. The feeling so manifest upon the accession of his son plainly indicates a sense of oppression among his own people. It is certainly supposable that this sense of being oppressed came to the knowledge of Solomon before his death.——Again, Prof. S. pleads that what is said (chap. 5: 1) respecting temple offerings and services ("Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools") hardly accords with the views given respecting the worship at the temple in the history (1 K. 3: 3, 4, 15 and 8: 5, 62–64, etc). To which it is pertinent to reply that precisely such a development of splendor and attractiveness in the externals of the temple-worship would draw together thousands of heartless men who would need the very caution which Solomon here gives them. Has it not always been so?——Remarkably Prof. S. urges that the "passage (7: 26–28) respecting the *extreme baseness of women* seems hardly consonant with the views of him who had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (1 K. 11: 1–8), and who was devoted, more than any other Jewish king known to us, to amatory enjoyments."——But it is much sounder philosophy to say that this conclusion is precisely what should be expected from such abuse of the marriage relation. How could Solomon know any thing of the tenderness, the fidelity, and the purity of woman's character? Writing near the close of such a connubial life, what other or better testimony from his experience could be expected? In view of Solomon's life, this passage testifies not so much against woman as against the ruin of all the nobler elements of womanhood by polygamy and concubinage.——A few other objections, when these are founded in misinterpretation are best reserved for notice when the passages themselves come under consideration.

In regard to this question of authorship it has seemed to me both legitimate and right that my mind should be influenced very considerably in the outset by these considerations; viz.: that the book is found in the sacred canon; that it must therefore have been accepted by the original compilers of the canon as in some vital sense *inspired*; and that they must have known whether the author was in fact Solomon or some nameless writer who set up a claim to be Solomon, but who really lived in their own age and under their own eye. Now I find the utmost difficulty in bringing my mind to

believe that Ezra and his associates, or as some suppose, his successors, placed this book in the sacred Hebrew canon, knowing that it was not written by Solomon in any sense or in any part, but was really written in their own times by some man who tried to personate Solomon. Those who at a somewhat later day had the canon in charge carefully excluded from it the spurious writings which now apppear in the Apocrypha, *e. g.*, those attributed to Ezra [Esdras], to Daniel, Baruch, Jeremiah, Solomon, etc. The spurious character of these writings sufficed to exclude them from the Hebrew canon. There were probably other reasons; yet who can doubt that their spuriousness alone would suffice to rule them out?——The same principle obtained in the formation of the New Testament canon. Spurious books, *e. g.*, letters falsely claiming to have been written by Paul, were, of course, excluded.——If Ecclesiastes *is* spurious, it stands alone in this respect among all the books of both the old Testament and the New. The rule of rejecting spurious writings, *i. e.*, forgeries, was faithfully observed in every case but this.——This principle commends itself to our sense of propriety and to all just views of inspiration. Of all men, he who is inspired of God should be expected to deal honestly and to speak truthfully. It outrages our convictions of God's eternal veracity and honesty to suppose that he directly inspired some servant of his in the age of Ezra or of Malachi to personate Solomon and claim to be, or to have been, a "son of David" and "king over Israel in Jerusalem." Nor does it much relieve the difficulty to suppose that this nameless writer himself first conceived this notion of passing himself off for Solomon and built his book upon it, and that then the Lord accepted the book as "profitable for doctrine, reproof," etc., and consequently directed his inspired servants to give it a place in the sacred canon.——Let us now for a moment shift our stand-point and look at this subject from another side. Suppose the doctrine held by so many modern critics to be true. Suppose that Solomon never wrote this book nor any thing of the sort. It was written (let it be supposed) by one Pseudo, who lived in the age of Malachi.——Then we have no proof from any authentic record that Solomon ever became heart-sick of his pursuit of worldly pleasure, or ever saw his sin in this matter, or ever came in his latter days to a deep sense of the duty of fearing and obeying God, and of the certainty and solemnity of the final judgment. All this, as actual knowledge, testified to by himself or by

any reliable record of his own times, is blotted out, and is not.—— How did Pseudo, living six hundred years later, get this knowledge? He has not told us. All he says on the subject is—"I am Solomon himself." But this very pretension convicts him of falsehood. How then can we believe any thing else he has to say?—— Again, if Pseudo, writing for a good moral end, had wished to benefit the world by the results of Solomon's experience, why did he not refer to Solomon's history in the legitimate way which all other sacred writers have adopted? Observe how Nehemiah does it (chap. 13: 26). Whole chapters of sacred writ are made up in this way, reciting the history of former times and the experiences of historic men, for the moral benefit of generations then living or yet to live. See (*e. g.*,) Neh. 9 and Ps. 78.——Such a method is honest and legitimate. If Pseudo had done this over his own name and in the manner of an honest writer, we could readily accept it for what it would be worth—so much tradition —hanging by a long thread indeed, but, perhaps, having some truth at the farther end.——Can we approach this theory of the authorship of Ecclesiastes with any other feeling than that of a deep and just repugnance?

Taking up the book with these views, I have naturally inquired whether a careful study of the history of Solomon, coupled with an equally careful study of this book, would not suggest a satisfactory view of its scope and purpose and thus afford a clue to its just exposition, in full harmony with the theory that Solomon was the author. [This inquiry belongs to our second topic and will be prosecuted there.]

The reader will judge how far this attempt seems to be successful. If successful, he will readily see that this theory must almost of necessity be true. If it harmonizes with both the external facts of the book and with its internal character; if it gives a book *from Solomon* according to the demands of the text, and also gives us a purpose and an argument legitimate for Solomon and every way befitting his circumstances and his character, then it has a claim to be accepted which can not reasonably be set aside. ——Hence we come next to consider—

II. The Theme and Special Aim of the Book.—These are points of vital moment. Fortunately its great theme is propounded very distinctly; "Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is

vanity." The utter vanity of all earthly things when sought as the chief good of man, stands out strongly in the opening sentence as the text of this sermon: it re-appears repeatedly during the discourse: it is made emphatic in the conclusion (12: 8). ——To prove this to his readers and to impress it upon their mind and heart, he adduces his own exhaustive experience; he also draws largely from his observation of other men; he takes up in detail numerous forms of earthly good which men are wont to seek, his eye sweeping the range not of Israel alone but of the "provinces" —those other tribes and countries with which his readers and himself were familiar—all converging to the same grand conclusion. His argumentation is not tied down to the rules of modern logic. His strain is usually discursive and not closely consecutive, so that it is often difficult, perhaps sometimes impossible, to trace with certainty any logical connection between his successive topics. Some of the points may seem to have at best only a remote bearing upon his main theme. Probably if we understood better the type of mind which he was specially addressing and the circumstances of the times under which he wrote, what seems now almost irrelevant might appear specially pertinent and timely. The state of the author's own mind and the views of those for whom he adapted his argument need to be known somewhat thoroughly in order to see the pertinence, beauty, and force of his book. Hence the personal history of Solomon up to the time when he wrote this book should be carefully studied in connection with the book itself as the legitimate means of obtaining the clue to his special aim and purpose in writing it.

The early life of Solomon and the great events of the first half of his reign are well known. There is no occasion therefore to eulogize his wisdom, or to descant upon the radiant promise of piety, usefulness and honor with which his royal career opened. We all know how assiduously and nobly he devoted himself to the building of the temple; how gorgeous and splendid a structure he reared; with what august ceremonials and with what beautiful appropriateness he ministered to its solemn dedication to the God of his fathers. We remember also how he opened a vigorous trade with Tyre, with Tarshish and doubtless other ports on the Western Mediterranean; with Ophir also, and with ports on the Indian Ocean; and moreover, through Tadmor in the wilderness, with the mighty East;—indeed with the entire commercial world

of his age.——Now it is obvious that these commercial relations involved somewhat intimate political relations as well. The history indicates such relations with Tyre and with Egypt. It can scarcely be doubted that these political relations led him on according to the usages of the times to the marrying of foreign wives as a means of cementing political alliances. ——Now let it be noted; these three facts of his regal life; his foreign commerce; his political alliances; and his heathen, idolatrous wives, *were each and all in violation of the spirit of the Hebrew Theocracy.* The entire policy of God's administration over Israel aimed to make them as a people simply agricultural and not commercial. The prophets constantly denounce all intimate alliance with foreign powers. (See Isa. 30 and 31.) The law explicitly forbade the king to multiply wives to himself, lest they turn away his heart. (See Deut. 17: 17 and 7: 3, 4 and Ex. 34: 16.) These three great sins combined their influence to weaken the moral stamina of the king and to ensnare him into deeper apostacy from God. It was not in the nature of a wisdom merely human, however masterly, to withstand such temptations. Even the great Solomon fell before them. The inspired record of his fall is brief but painfully expressive.

"But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, *and* Hittites; Of the nations *concerning* which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: *for* surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, *that* his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as *was* the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as *did* David his father. Then did Solomon build a high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that *is* before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon. And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods." (1 K. 11: 1–8).

The reader will note the main points: that Solomon was then old; that his many wives and concubines were from the adjacent heathen nations; that Solomon "loved them"—"clave to them in love;" and that they turned away his heart from the true God to

the gods of the heathen.——Add to this the yet more brief allusion made by Nehemiah (13: 26); "Did not Solomon, king of Israel, sin by these things [the marriage of heathen wives]? Yet among many nations was there no king like him who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel; nevertheless, even him did outlandish women cause to sin." Alas, that so great a king should make so great a fall!——These latter years of Solomon's reign lie under a dark cloud. Little is said of them pertaining either to the kingdom or the king. The sacred historian—or rather shall we say the Divine Spirit who guided his pen—was too honest to ignore the painful fact of the king's fall; yet on the other hand this fact and its consequences to the social and religious life of the nation and its king are dismissed with few words as an unwelcome theme. Some things, however, may be inferred safely from the inevitable influence of such apostacy, and are confirmed moreover by the developments made at the king's death in connection with the accession of his son. Thus it was inevitable that the king's apostasy should operate disastrously upon public morals and piety. There was an appalling change from Solomon upon his knees before the assembled people offering prayer at the dedication of the temple, to the same Solomon building altars and shrines to the gods of Moab, Ammon, Edom, and Tyre. It was disastrous that this same great king, after leading the pious in their sacred worship during the early years of his reign should in his later years head this base idolatry which he had himself imported with his heathen wives and concubines, and had installed in the high places of social position and royal favor. The influence upon the masses of the people must have been exceedingly pervading and fearful because of the prestige of wisdom, splendor, and dignity which invested the throne. When, at Solomon's death, we find that Jeroboam's scheme of semi-idolatry met with no remonstrance from the masses of the ten tribes, we see ample reason to conclude that the tone of national piety had greatly declined.——It is also obvious that when Solomon gave his heart so entirely and so sinfully to his strange wives and to the numerous foreigners who must have filled his court, he withdrew his heart from his people, and consequently lost, in great measure, their profound esteem and love. For, if he had retained their love till his death, the power of his name would have seated his son immovably upon the father's throne. But it is quite apparent that the revolution met

with no special resistance from any cherished remembrance of their late sovereign. On the contrary, it appears that they had been galled by his severe exactions of tribute, and that this was practically the one thing which remained impressed on their minds and holding over after that once honored head was laid in the dust. We must, therefore, conclude that the love and respect of his people which Solomon unquestionably enjoyed during the early years of his reign had signally disappeared before his death. The loss of it will no doubt account in part for his personal restiveness and wretchedness in the midst of unparalleled external splendor. It helped to intensify his sense of the utter vanity of human thrones —filled unworthily. In his mind it must have given a thrilling significance to the words of his text: "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; all is vanity."

We shall fail to reach the fountain-sin of Solomon's later and apostate life if we stop with idolatry and overlook that *love of the world* which in all ages "worketh death." The heart of Solomon became a pleasure-loving heart; his life a pleasure-seeking life. He sought pleasure in wealth and splendor; he sought it in fame and honor; he sought it in all forms of sensual enjoyment. The immense resources at his command were lavishly expended upon this one object. Such pleasure-seeking swept him away from the fear and service of God. It was to him, we may fairly assume, "the root of all evil." It led him on to those associations which ensnared him into idolatry.——A gracious providence spared Solomon to live till he became convicted, even if not radically penitent. After so much guilty wandering, he "came to himself and thought on his ways." It can not be said on authority that he ever saw clearly the guilt of his idolatry, but it is plain that he saw the folly of his pleasure-loving life and felt the solemn obligation resting on all rational beings "to fear God and keep his commandments" as their supreme duty. Having reached these convictions, it was inevitable that he should feel the importance of undoing, so far as he might be able, the mischiefs he had done. For this purpose he became "the Preacher," and wrote this book.

Here we meet a question, vital to the legitimate interpretation of the book, viz., *For whom, definitely, was it prepared?* What class of people were specially in his mind; for whom consequently both the style of language and the course of thought would be carefully adapted?——I answer, Those who had been most directly

under his influence and with whom in the most sinning years of his life he had been intimately associated. These were—(1.) His wives and concubines, and their family connections and special friends; and (2.) His political allies and admirers in foreign courts; and (3.) His commercial acquaintances to whom his extensive foreign trade had introduced him; (4.) Those also who like the Queen of Sheba had been attracted to him by his fame for wisdom.——In close intimacy with all these classes he had sinned. Before them it was altogether appropriate that he should bear this testimony of confession and of solemn truth for their admonition. He could not but know that they (like the Queen of Sheba) had looked upon him as a paragon of *success* in the pursuit of worldly happiness. His brilliant reign, his immense wealth, his unprecedented splendor, his almost unlimited provision of those most coveted appliances for the gratification of every taste and every sense conspired to make him the great Observed Man of the age. His personal influence upon the hearts of the aspirants for worldly pleasure must have been unbounded.—— Hence when he came to see the grand mistake and sin of his heart and of his life, and came also to see how pernicious his influence had been especially upon these classes, how could he do less than precisely what he has done in this book? That he should write especially for these classes is so appropriate in itself—is so legitimate as one of the fruits of a convicted heart—that we naturally assume and expect it. We do not see how he could fail to do it, or could be willing to die till he had done it.—— Why he is silent in reference to the sin of idolatry, it may not be possible to say absolutely. It may be that his convictions of guilt in that respect were less deep and truthful than we should naturally expect in a penitent man. This view is favored by the fact that in his best days, he "sacrificed and burnt incense in high places." (See 1 Kings 3: 3, 4.) Or it may be that he accounted his pleasure-loving spirit and life his chief sin—the fountain of all his other sins—and therefore restricted his book to this. Or we may class this omission under the general fact that prior to the apostolic age aggressive assaults upon foreign idolatry were never made and seem not to have been regarded as within the scope of religious work. Or perhaps in view of all the circumstances of his life, he was led of God to regard this discussion of man's chief good as his special work, to which he was preëminently

fitted and to which therefore God definitely called him—leaving to others what others could do as well or better than he. Upon this point no light of revelation has fallen. I must therefore leave it with only these brief conjectural hints. ——The hypothesis that Solomon wrote somewhat specifically for those with and before whom he had especially sinned, seems to me to be a legitimate dictate of common sense. Given, the wise but sensual and sinning Solomon, now impressed with a sense of his sin and folly, and of his consequent duty to obviate the mischiefs thereof—and we have as a result, *this book*, written for those who had most emulated his pernicious example.

Now in the light of this hypothesis, two prominent features of this book—the same which have been the main ground of objection to Solomon as the author—receive a satisfactory elucidation; viz., the dialect in which the book is written, and the somewhat frequent allusions to misgovernment and civil oppression. This oppression may have been chiefly *outside* of his own kingdom, and precisely under the direct observation of many of his readers. There was enough of it there.——His dialect manifestly came from the outlying countries and was intended to go back to them again.——I shall have occasion to speak of both these points somewhat in detail in another place.——Moreover, this hypothesis in regard to the special design of the book accounts for the fact that its argument addresses mainly a class of readers moving in the higher strata of society—the rich and well-conditioned who have high aspirations for worldly pleasure and large means for its pursuit. The author does indeed allude to the toiling and down-trodden millions; but the main drift of his argument adapts itself rather to men who are seeking great fortunes or who have already gained them.——And further, if we accept the hypothesis that a considerable portion of those for whom he specially wrote were foreign merchants or men of foreign courts, we get some relief from these difficulties otherwise felt; viz., Why is the moral tone of many of his precepts so low? And why this utter absence of allusion to the national history of the Hebrew people in illustration of God's moral and providential government over men?——These and kindred points have seemed to me to constitute the most stubborn difficulties of the book. They are certainly relieved very considerably if we may assume that Solomon wrote it especially for those whose training had been under the darkness

of the outlying lands, and that therefore he let himself down to their intellectual and moral state. Thus Paul, before Jewish audiences, "reasoned out of their own Scriptures from morning till evening" (Acts 28: 23), but before the men of Athens, only from the great book of nature and from the testimony of the human conscience, with the addition perhaps of their own poets and altar inscriptions (Acts 17: 22–34). So Solomon had for the basis of his argument the universal conception of some great God; the moral convictions as to right and wrong of all human souls; and a wide range of personal experience and observation, coupled with the analogous though more limited experience and observation of his readers. From those sources he drew his staple arguments; upon their basis he rests his appeals.——A higher plane, intellectually and morally, was even in that age held by the men of favored Israel—the land where God had long dwelt and had recorded his name; but Solomon seems not to assume that his readers are in that higher plane, nor does he propose at once to raise them up to it. Does not this view of the case account for the lack of a higher moral tone in this book; for the fact of only the slightest allusion to religious worship and institutions, and no allusion whatever to Hebrew history or a written revelation? Have we not a good reason for the fact that this is a treatise on natural and not revealed religion?——This argument places his thousand wives and their associates, who were mostly of heathen origin and education, in the same class essentially with the princes and merchants of the same foreign lands. Coming into Israel to reside, they did not come to adopt and enjoy the religion of Israel, but brought their own, and therefore, intellectually and morally, remained unchanged.——It may not be amiss to suggest here that a theory of the book which meets all its difficult points so readily and naturally, and which corresponds so completely with the known and supposable features of Solomon's reign and character—with his connubial, commercial and political relations—presents strong claims to be accepted as true.

III. The Style or Dialect of the Book.—This is quite peculiar. There is no extant Hebrew of the same character. Indeed there is none which very closely resembles it. The writers after the exile present more of its peculiarities than any other books extant; yet even their dialect is quite unlike this. The resem-

blances, such as they are, have been the staple argument with many learned critics in their attempt to prove that Solomon could not have written this book, and that some unknown author, living between Ezra and the Maccabees—*i. e.*, from fifty to three hundred years after the restoration from Babylon—must have produced it.——The special features of this dialect can not be presented profitably before the merely English reader. Nor is it at all necessary. I have no controversy with the critics here referred to in regard to the fact of a diversity of style between this book and the book of Proverbs, for example, or the Psalms of David. But I account for this diversity upon an entirely different hypothesis. They say it belongs to a later age. I maintain that it belongs not to a later *age* but to *another people*. As already said and shown, the latter years of Solomon's life brought him into the closest relationship with foreigners, people of outlying lands—Tyre, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Arabia. They constituted his family, his court, and hence his most intimate associates at home; they were in closest correspondence with him abroad. Add to this his knowledge of adjacent dialects gained by foreign travel; for Solomon "*went*" to Hamath-zobah; "*went*" to Ezion-geber; and probably located and built Tadmor after personal inspection. (See 2 Chron. 8: 3, 4, 17). It follows inevitably that he would become familiar with their dialect. It does not follow that he lost his vernacular dialect, but only that he became familiar with the dialect of the "outlandish women" (Neh. 13: 26) who drew him into sin, and of the outlandish princes and men of trade with whom he was in constant and somewhat intimate association.——This being admitted, we may advance another step. Having become familiar with this dialect, and having occasion to write specially for this class of people, Solomon used it. Why should not he? No reason can be given why he should not; there is every reason why he should. ——But it will be asked What is the proof that this dialect of the outlying countries in Solomon's time corresponds with that of Ecclesiastes?——1. It is held by all learned critics, and is indeed altogether undeniable, that the Hebrew, or some dialect of it, was the language of all those countries of Southwestern Asia, including the original Canaanites, Philistines, Phenicians (*i. e.*, the people of Tyre and Sidon), Syria, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Arabia, and even Chaldea.——2. While the spoken dialect changed scarcely at all with the lapse of time among the same people, there were

yet provincialisms in different localities, and some variety in the dialects spoken by different tribes and nations. Of these provincialisms, we have traces in the history of Jephthah (Judges 12: 5, 6), as between the men of Ephraim and the men of Gilead on the east of Jordan. The test word "Shibboleth" revealed it.——Diversity of dialect appears in Neh. 13: 23, 24. "I saw Jews who had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab, and their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people." It will be noticed that Solomon's wives came in part from these identical countries.——Again, as between the "Syrian" and the common Hebrew of Palestine, a difference of dialect appears in Isa. 36; 11, when the officers of Hezekiah say to Rabshakeh, "Speak, I pray thee, unto thy servants in the Syrian language, for we understand it: and speak not to us in the Jews' language, in the ears of the people that are upon the wall." This language, called "Syrian," was that of Assyria, yet not very widely diverse from that of the Jews. It would seem that the higher classes, especially those of the court, understood it, but that the lower classes did not.——The Chaldee proper, the language of Babylon at the time of the exile, was yet farther removed from the Hebrew of Palestine, but was of the same family or group of languages. The countries lying nearer to Canaan, *e. g.*, Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Syria, had dialects that were much less remote from the Hebrew of Israel than the Chaldean was.——3. Fortunately, we are able to advance yet further, and adduce evidence little short of demonstration to the point now in question. It happens that some remains of the ancient Phenician language (that of Tyre and Sidon), have come down to our times. By ancient here I mean as old as the age of Solomon. Gesenius has published a work entitled "Monuments of the Phenician Language," in which he says (as quoted by Stuart on Ecclesiastes, p. 80), "The Phenician remains are more kindred to the later than to the earlier Hebrew, *e. g.*, the relative "ashr" is abbreviated and only the middle consonant is fully written—an important circumstance for the history of the Hebrew language."——This peculiar use of the relative is one of the most palpable features in the special dialect of Ecclesiastes. Yet Gesenius affirms that precisely this usage of it is universal in the dialect of Tyre in the age of Solomon. And in general the dialect of Tyre in that age

is more kindred to the Hebrew of Ezra and Malachi than to the Hebrew of David. In other words, by going over the geographical boundaries of Israel in the age of Solomon, you find very nearly the same dialect which you reach by coming down five hundred years in Judah to the age of Ezra and Malachi. So that there is not the least necessity, nor even occasion to come down to the time of Malachi to find a man who could or who naturally would write in the dialect of the book of Ecclesiastes. You have him provided in Solomon himself, made familiar with the then current dialect of Phenicia, and writing for the special use of his foreign wives and his numerous foreign associates, friends, and admirers. At the same time, let it be observed, this dialect would not be so diverse from the Hebrew of Palestine as to be unintelligible to the Israelites.——It deserves yet more special notice that you do not find precisely, or even nearly the dialect of Ecclesiastes in the writings of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi. While Ecclesiastes has some peculiarities that are like theirs, it has more that are unlike. These peculiarities pertain not mainly to grammatical forms, but to the use of new words; of old words in somewhat new senses, and of new derivatives from old roots. Some of these peculiarities—we can not perhaps say just how many—may be due to difference of subject. We have no other philosophical essay but this in any extant Hebrew.——Again, Ecclesiastes differs yet more widely from the real Chaldean tongue. Here grammatical forms as well as new words present strong points of diversity. Hence it is worse than vain to search for an author for Ecclesiastes in some geographical location nearer to Chaldea, or in the age of greater Chaldean influence over the spoken Hebrew of Palestine. ——In fine, this argument might probably be made conclusive if we had before us sufficient specimens of the Hebrew dialect then in use in Tyre, Edom, Moab, and Arabia. It is very much to our purpose that all those remains which are still extant give their whole strength to sustain the theory here assumed.——Yet another and distinct argument may be drawn from the choice of a Hebrew name for God. Let it be borne in mind that these names being all significant, *Elohim* looks specially to the natural attributes of God; *Jehovah*, to his moral attributes. Elohim is God thought of as Almighty, the Lord of nature, the Great God who is infinitely above all the false gods of the heathen; but Jehovah is the God of the promises, forever the same, forever faithful and true, forever

more the God of his covenant people. With this distinction in mind, let us consider the fact that in the book of Proverbs the name Elohim occurs but five times; the name Jehovah about ninety times, showing that when writing for his own people, Solomon naturally used the latter name. But in the book of Ecclesiastes, the name Elohim appears thirty-nine times; the name Jehovah, *not once*. The people of the outlying lands knew not this sacred name. To them its special significance as a God of promise—a God of covenant—was utterly unknown. Hence the fact that Solomon, writing specially for their reading, never uses this name.

Yet further, the facts concerning the use of these names of God are in point to explode the favorite Neological theory of the date and author of this book, viz.: that it was written after the restoration from Babylon, to comfort the Hebrew people under their national affliction. But let Ecclesiastes be compared, in respect to its use of the names of God, with the known writings of that age. In the Psalms of that period (mostly 91–150), the name Jehovah occurs almost exclusively. In the three prophets of the restoration, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, Elohim occurs in its absolute form five times; Jehovah no less than two hundred and fourteen times. Yet Ecclesiastes, claimed by the Neologists to bear the same date and to have the same general purpose, gives the name Jehovah not *even once!*

IV. The Alleged Skepticism of the Author.—The points in regard to which skepticism may be charged with some plausibility are not the existence of God; not his attributes (abstractly viewed) of goodness and justice; but the doctrine of a future life and of God's righteous moral government over men.——In the outset there arises a preliminary question somewhat vital to the result; viz., Whether we shall assume the author's self-consistency, and consequently whether we shall carry his strong declarations of orthodox sentiments in certain passages, to the interpretation of those which have the aspect more or less of skepticism.——If we do assume the author to be throughout self-consistent, we shall construe his whole book in a way which will involve no skepticism whatever. On the other hand if it seems admissible to assume that the author is not altogether self-consistent, but intends to give the reader his shifting, changeful moods of thought as they

occurred, both in his days of apostasy, and subsequently in his seasons of sober and more just thought, then another construction might be given to his language and we might find skeptical views, obviously as the fruit of a pleasure-loving heart and life, but disappearing with his return to a better moral state.——At this stage of our investigation it is not important to affirm absolutely yea or nay, on this preliminary question. When the special passages come under consideration, I shall endeavor to show what their sense seems to be and how their interpretation may be modified in accordance with either of these alternatives. —— Extreme views have been held on this point, on the one hand by those who make the author more a skeptic than he makes himself; and on the other, by those who in their zeal to acquit him of all suspicion of skepticism, insist that he introduces a skeptical objector to say the words in dispute, and then answers these objections himself. The former class seem to me to violate the rule of charity which requires that of two admissible constructions, of claims otherwise equal, the most orthodox should be preferred if the speaker be a professedly good man. Also, some have erred by construing as general or universal statements what the author intended to say with only a specific and limited application. Thus by misinterpretation the author has been subjected to the charge of more skepticism than he is guilty of.——On the other hand it avails nothing to try to exonerate him by the groundless assumption that the words in question are not his own but those of an ideal or supposed objector. Thus Prof. Stuart, who holds this view, claims to find analogous cases to this in Paul's Epistles where (*e. g.*, Rom. 3: 8 and 1 Cor. 15: 35) he says, "Let us do evil that good may come;" and, "How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?" Also in the case of Job's three friends and in Ps. 73.——But the reader will notice that these cases differ from the case of the author of Ecclesiastes in precisely the vital point. Paul is always careful to draw the line unmistakably between what is said by the objector and what is said by himself. He never leaves you in doubt for a moment whether he is saying these skeptical words as his own sentiments. So also the words of Job's three friends rest on their responsibility alone. Neither Job nor the Almighty endorse them; but both disown them. There is no room for the mistake that their doctrine stands in the Bible with the authority of inspiration. So the writer of Ps. 73 records certain sentiments which

he once entertained; but he tells us that when he came into the sanctuary of God he saw them to be all wrong and then he exclaims against himself: "So foolish was I and ignorant; I was as a beast before thee!" And now he rejects those views of his former "foolish" and "ignorant" self with strong reprobation!—— But the author of Ecclesiastes gives us no hint whatever of an objector other than himself, nor does he hint that his own views have changed from what they were. He makes no confession of previous skeptical views or darkness of mind from which he subsequently emerges. He talks right on as if quite unconscious of saying in one passage what he gainsays in another.——These considerations should have force in favor of such a construction of his words as will not involve real skepticism. For in the end (as all admit) he comes out with true and staunch faith in both the future life and the just moral government of God.——Yet it is still supposable [and therefore worth considering] that the author of the book may intend to give the changeful hues of his own thoughts as he passed along through his backsliding, skeptical life, perhaps more than willing that the world should see in his case that a pleasure-loving life by a natural law of mind begets skepticism—first leading men to hate the light because their deeds are evil and because this light exposes them very uncomfortably; and then, for the sake of a more quiet conscience, to put darkness for light and light for darkness; *i. e.*, to subvert these irritating moral realities and believe error to be truth and truth to be error. There is no law of mind more important to be understood than this, that persistent sinning in the face of perceived and admitted truth is a perpetual annoyance to a man's sense of self-respect, and therefore tempts him strongly to repel and pervert the truth which gives him this trouble. Thus it is that error, affording some relief to a consciously guilty mind, is made welcome. What a man so *wishes* to believe he accepts almost unconsciously, and often in the face of very clear convictions of both its falsehood and its folly.——The acute mind of Solomon must have been fully aware of this law of depraved human nature, and therefore, as already suggested, he may have been quite willing that his own example should stand as a moral warning against such abuse of reason and conscience. Such a construction of Solomon's words is therefore admissible in view of the laws of mind. The question whether it be the true construction is one of interpretation, to be determined therefore

by its laws. We must consider this when the passages come before us.

It may not be amiss to suggest here that in my view the points in the book which savor most strongly of skepticism appear, not in the form of distinctly expressed doubts as to the future life, or the moral government of God; much less in the form of direct denial of those truths; but rather in the low moral tone of the inferences which he seems to draw from certain great truths (*e. g.*, the fact of universal mortality) which should stimulate high moral purposes. But this feature of the book will come up for consideration somewhat in the next general head, and yet more in my notes on the passages themselves.

V. The Author's Alleged Epicureanism in Commending "Mirth" and Present Enjoyment.—The term *epicurean* is convenient and current to denote a supreme regard for present sensual pleasure. Its spirit is—let us get all we can of such pleasure at any cost or any consequences.—— Do the words of Solomon in this book, legitimately interpreted, breathe this spirit and inculcate this course of life?

In the first place if we may assume that he wrote as a sensible and self-consistent man, and if his words will at all bear a self-consistent construction, we must construe them as being *against*, and not in favor of, epicureanism. For, what is the great doctrine of his book? What but this,—that worldy pleasure, sought as man's chief good, is utter vanity? That is to say, the substance and soul of the book asserts and re-asserts that the epicurean life is an utter failure. Hence nothing can be more palpably self-contradictory than for this book to commend the epicurean spirit and life as the best thing possible for man. It is as if Solomon should begin—"My epicurean friends, I have two things to say: first, your whole life and labor are utter vanity: secondly, go on and prosper: make the most of it; for I know of nothing better."——This construction of the book is *a priori* violently improbable—to be rejected therefore if any other can be found less revolting, less absurd and less glaringly inconsistent with the great doctrine of the book.

The better construction is at hand. It is in itself not unphilosophical; and moreover derives support from the view above taken of the special aim of the book as seen in the light of the class

particularly addressed.——Solomon wrote for pleasure-loving and pleasure-seeking men. He is no ascetic himself; he does not believe in decrying the moderate pleasures which God provides for us in our daily food and nightly rest: and he knows that if he were to push the doctrine of the vanity of this world to this extreme, his words would only recoil upon himself and would utterly frustrate his great purpose. Therefore he sees the necessity of discriminating sharply between loving the world supremely and loving its legitimate comforts very moderately; between grasping it in a spirit that is reckless of God, and accepting certain forms of its pleasure as kindly provided and given of God, to be accepted with gratitude; between devoting one's utmost powers to unlimited acquisition, and being satisfied with the moderate enjoyments which man's physical constitution provides for, and God's love bestows. This discrimination, always important to the effective moral presentation of the subject, was in Solomon's case altogether vital to the least success. Having been over the same ground himself and fully comprehending the character of his contemplated readers, he saw how surely his preaching the vanity of worldly things would fall powerless if it were not accompanied with these exceptive modifications. He knew that men of the world hold the constitutional enjoyments of life to be admissible and right, and that their good sense persistently repels any effort to make them think otherwise. He therefore took special pains not to offend and repel them from his doctrine. It was not the moderate enjoyment of one's daily bread or of the well-ordered family state that he set forth as vanity and exhorted men to renounce. It was not the legitimate use but the gross abuse of the world that he condemned. The thing he decried and deplored was that in this matter men should be reckless of the ordinations of Divine Providence and of their responsibility to their Great Lawgiver and Judge, and that then, in this spirit, not satisfied with the moderate, legitimate enjoyments of life, they should stride on with all-grasping desire and unmeasured toil to accumulate wealth, honor, and sensual pleasure till they make the whole of life one intense and utter vanity, and bring upon themselves the righteous retributions of their Maker. His book as a whole bears this construction, and it is therefore due to the author to give it.

VI. The Practical Value of this Book for the age of Solomon and for every age.—If the view above given of its main doctrine and of its special purpose be just, it surely meets a great moral want of mankind. For who does not know that the over-anxious, excessive, and ungodly pursuit of worldly good has been, in all ages, the bane of the race? Who does not know that in this pursuit men have trampled down the rights of their fellows, have forgotten God their Maker, and so have made utter shipwreck of their own well-being for time and for eternity!——Our Lord and his apostles have borne their testimony in the strongest form to the greatness of this sin and to the fearful ruin which it has brought upon both the bodies and the souls of men.

In the age of Solomon, the value of this book was heightened greatly by its testimony from his experience and by his personal relations to his first readers. No man ever lived who stood out more prominently before the men of his time as an illustrious example of *success* in all those forms of earthly good which human hearts are wont to love and seek. Sagacious and far-seeing, he made every undertaking prosper. Rich beyond all precedent, he enjoyed the luxury of having, more than most men, made his fortune by his own skillful efforts. Exalted in power, he had the satisfaction of witnessing a steady growth and expansion of his royal influence until far along in his reign. And who ever had a wider range than he for sensual gratification? What was there in the broad fields of desirable pleasure that he could not command to his heart's utmost request?——His fame went abroad to every land. He was known every-where as the wise, the honored, the splendid, the successful monarch of a great and prosperous kingdom. The Queen of Sheba was only one of many who heard, admired, and applauded. What could human heart wish more?——Now, therefore, let such a man give the world his testimony as to the intrinsic satisfaction which such a life affords him. He is surely entitled to speak by authority. There is no impeaching his testimony. Let him speak, and let a fair construction give his words their legitimate force and just application. Let him speak, and let not his words be snatched from his lips and put into the mouth of some unknown author who would impose upon mankind by pretending to be Solomon, "king over Israel in Jerusalem." Let him speak; all the wise will listen. Let him speak; his experience may save thousands from the folly of a selfishly pleasure-

loving and pleasure-seeking life, and from the ruin which such a life so certainly involves. Let him speak, and let the earth hear, for his voice is the testimony of God, warning all pleasure-loving men of the rocks on which myriads have made shipwreck, not for time only, but for eternity.

# ECCLESIASTES.

## CHAPTER I.

Solomon introduces himself (v. 1); propounds his subject (v. 2); begins with the fruitlessness of human toil (v. 3); illustrates it by the ceaseless revolutions in the course of nature (vs. 4–7); corresponding to which are the routine and labor of human life (vs. 8–10); all which things pass into oblivion, never making sufficent impression to be long remembered (v. 11). Again the author introduces himself in order to speak more definitely of his own experience (vs. 12–18).

1. The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

David had no other son, king in Jerusalem, but Solomon. This verse, therefore, as also v. 12, was designed to describe Solomon as the author of this book.——In the general introduction I have referred to the probable reason for his styling himself "the preacher;" viz., that in this book he appears before men, not in his usual character of king, but in the special character of a moral teacher, inculcating lessons of wisdom. So he indicates in his closing section: "Because the Preacher was wise, he taught the people knowledge," etc., (12: 9–12).——The original Hebrew word for "Preacher" is by some critics transferred without translation—"*Coheleth.*" Hengstenberg insists that being feminine, it must be an abstract noun denoting wisdom, personified (as he supposes) in the person of Solomon. From this circumstance, he labors (unsuccessfully) to prove that the author of the book was not Solomon himself. I accept the explanation given by Gesenius and Stuart, viz., that in Hebrew, feminine nouns are in current use to denote office, station, and specifically the men who fill them, as we say, "his Excellency;" "his royal Highness;" "his Grace"—indicating thus a person who fills some high position.——

The sense of the term is well given by the Septuagint version which has the Greek word "Ecclesiastes," the Preacher. The Hebrew verb from which the noun comes, means primarily to convoke an assembly, but obviously is associated with its purpose, viz., to *address* them, and hence the idea of preacher. Some have supposed that the idea of *convening, gathering* (*i. e.*, the people) contemplates drawing them away from vanity and sin to God and a religious life. This seems to me rather far-fetched.——Comparing the Song of Solomon with Ecclesiastes, Wordsworth says beautifully—"Solomon's first work, the Canticles, is entitled the Song of Songs, *i. e.*, the most excellent of all songs, for there he sings the joys of the devout soul united to God. But his last work, Ecclesiastes, begins, 'Vanity of vanities,' or 'Utter vanity,' because he is here describing the hollowness of all earthly joys on which the soul sets the affections independently of God. The Song of Songs describes the joy of the human soul united to God; but Ecclesiastes with its opening words, 'Vanity of vanities," describes the misery of the soul divorced from God. The former is the gladsome carol of a spiritual marriage; the latter is the funeral dirge of a spiritual death. The *unrythmical* character of Ecclesiastes strengthens the contrast. He had no longer any relish for poetry and song." (Compare 12: 4.)

2. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all *is* vanity.

The phrase, "vanity of vanities," is a Hebrew idiom, denoting utter, supreme vanity; the most vain of all vain things. What and how much he included under the comprehensive statement, "*all* is vanity," must be learned from the book as a whole, which will give his own comments and explanations. Plainly he did not intend to say that it is a vain thing to "fear God and keep his commandments;" but only that all other human life but this is vain—vain in the sense of being profitless, delusive, fraught with utter disappointment as to the desired result—enduring and soul-satisfying happiness. These points will be more fully and clearly unfolded as we proceed.

3. What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun?

The original word for "profit" suggests the sense—What *surplus* of good, what net income or excess of good over actual cost, comes of all the labor of men which is done under the sun? Men toil for bread; they eat and live; then die; but what is the result of all? Do they find the enduring happiness which they seek so earnestly? Alas! for their utter failure! Such is the life of those myriads who "have not God in all their thoughts." Their life as to enjoyment is scarcely more or other than that of animals!

4. *One* generation passeth away, and *another* generation cometh: but the earth abideth forever.

5. The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose.

6. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits.

7. All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea *is* not full: unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.

Ceaseless toil, in one perpetual round with no real progress; so man lives and labors, and gets no resulting good. This seems to be the central thought in these several illustrations. Human generations come and go; the earth on which they dwell abides unchanged. The sun rises and sets each day, and according to the ancient modes of expression, hastens by some unknown path from his setting place to his rising, to come forth again "like a strong man to run a race." The winds blow toward the south; then return toward the north, sweeping round their ever varying circuits; and just so the waters of our globe are in ceaseless motion, flowing in rivers to the sea, but never filling it; for evaporation lifts those waters again into the atmosphere where they form clouds which pour the same waters again upon the earth—filling the springs, swelling the rivers, which again run into the great deep sea.——So the order of nature gives us perpetual revolution—which in one aspect of it is labor without progress. It is in this special aspect that Solomon compares these features in the course of nature with the course of human life. It is indeed a somber view of human life, as it is also of the course of nature; but, as to the masses of men in every age of the world yet, not more somber than true. For what has been the product of substantial good from the toilsome lives of the myriads who have been born, have lived, and have died in the lapse of the thousands of human generations since the world began? What have they done to bless each other and to make the world better, and thereby to gain for themselves the solid pleasures of a useful life?

> "The man may last, but never lives,
> Who much receives, but nothing gives;
> Whom none can love, whom none can thank,
> Creation's blot; creation's blank."

The men who have *lasted* but never *lived* through the few and short years of their earthly life, to pass away then and be forgotten, have been the myriads of our race; the rest have been the rare exceptions. These exceptions would give us quite another view of human life—its labors of love wrought with angelic spirit; self-sacrificing, but for this very reason, prolific in the purest

enjoyment. Corresponding to this in the course of nature, we should think of the sun as rising to pour forth light and heat to the joy of a waking world, to the quickening of animal and vegetable life in all climes—his face like the open face of God smiling on the worlds he has made fair and good. The changeful winds break the otherwise painful monotony of climate and seasons, bringing us now the grateful warmth of summer's heat and now the welcome stimulus of winter's cold; now the rains and now the cloudless skies; and so also the ceaseless revolutions of the waters of our earth are by no means everlasting labor without resulting good, for at every point in their revolutions they perform some ministries of useful service. Falling in rains and dews; flowing in rivers; rolling in the billows of the sea; coming back in the cool overshadowing clouds; every-where they wait on man and all the animal races with their hands full of blessings. So human life *might be;* so it *would* be if men were only true to the mission God gives them as the elements of nature are true to their Creator in the sphere he gives them to fill.——But Solomon is thinking only of the never ceasing routine of human toil, selfishly designed and selfishly applied; and to get from nature the symbol of this he must think of the ceaseless march of human generations from the cradle to the grave with no progress in human well-being, of the naked fact of everlasting sameness in the revolutions of the sun and the winds and the waters of our globe.

8. All things *are* full of labor; man can not utter *it:* the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

The first clause admits of two constructions, turning on the two different senses of the word rendered "things," which means not only things, but more often and naturally *words.* Hence some of the best critics, *e. g.*, Gesenius, Hengstenberg, and Stuart, read; "All words tire"—*i. e.*, in the effort to describe it. This construction has also in its favor that it harmonizes with the next clause, "Man can not utter it."——Other critics, *e. g.*, Rosenmueller and Michaelis, are with the English version. Neither sense is bad.——The last clause—"the eye not satisfied," etc., gives other illustrations of the leading truth of the passage—human desire never fully gratified. Everlasting toil with no adequate compensating returns.

9. The thing that hath been, it *is that* which shall be; and that which is done *is* that which shall be done: and *there is* no new *thing* under the sun.

10. Is there *any* thing whereof it may be said, See this *is* new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us.

Human life affords nothing new. It is only a perpetual recurrence of the same things. What has been is the same with what

will be: only one unvarying routine of labor and toil after good which yet men never find.——The last clause of v. 10 might well be read: "Long ago hath it been in the ages that were before us." ——What Solomon says here was true on a larger scale then than now; there in western Asia, than here in our America. That was neither the age nor the country for those new things which come up among us in the progress of the arts and the wonders of modern invention. Yet it should be borne in mind that Solomon's thought is mainly upon the great operations of the material world and the laws of human life.

11. *There is* no remembrance of former *things;* neither shall there be *any* remembrance of *things* that are to come with *those* that shall come after.

Events once passed are no more remembered; events yet future will in like manner be forgotten by those who shall live after they have transpired. No man can do any thing that will make sufficient impression on the mind of the race to be long remembered. We all know that the countless things done in the ages before us have, almost without exception, dropped into oblivion forever. We must infer the same result in regard to whatever we or others may be doing now. Consequently man's passion for a name and fame that shall outlast his mortal life is sure to be frustrated; and he might as well know beforehand that all such hopes are vain. What then comes of human toil? All human glory perishes. Life is but a treadmill process with no resulting good that endures and pays him for his labor. This is the outcome of every pleasure-seeking life. To this conclusion it must come at last.

12. I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem.

This renewed introduction of himself to his readers, essentially repeating what he had said in v. 1, seems to have special reference to the statement which immediately follows. I, who have been and still am king, have, notwithstanding the cares of my kingdom, given my attention very closely to the great philosophical problem of human life and happiness.——Those who attribute the book to some other pen than Solomon's make a point here by asking why Solomon should need to tell his own subjects that he was king over Israel in Jerusalem. Who of them all did not know this already?——I answer, (1.) It is one thing that a man of Israel should know that Solomon was his king, and quite another to know that this same Solomon wrote this book. The latter they would not know by any intuition nor by any testimony so naturally as from his own statement in the book itself.——But (2.) A more important reason for the statement lay in the point assumed in my introduction, viz.: that this book was written to go abroad to other lands where Solomon was less known. Perhaps he hoped it might go where he was not known at all, or only by vague rumor. The specifications precisely meet this supposition: "I was *king;*" not

a subject, or in any other more humble station of life than royalty. I was king *over Israel*—a nation you may have heard of; and *in Jerusalem*," whose regal splendor as a city of the great king has gone abroad probably to your own distant land. Besides, Solomon may have been already apprised that his kingdom was to be rent asunder and no successor of his be king over all Israel in Jerusalem. The future kings of Israel located their thrones elsewhere.

13. And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all *things* that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith.

The course of thought in this book shows that the precise point of his philosophical study was not so much the laws of human action as the results of human toil—the question being whether the usual struggle for earthly happiness is successful, and, if not, why it fails and how it can be made successful. A philosophical inquiry into the motives of human conduct and the means of acting upon the human will, would be quite another thing; and yet more unlike still would be a philosophical inquiry into the nature of the will and into its relations to our other mental faculties. Solomon's inquiry is conducted with wisdom, is pursued laboriously, and is one of most vital moment in a practical point of view. ——As to the last half of the verse, it is a question whether this sore travail is that of human life generally, or that which he himself experiences in this study of human life. Is it the subject-matter of his philosophical investigations, or is it the very labor itself of pushing this investigation?——In favor of the former view is the fact that precisely the same language is used (chap. 3: 10) for this travail of human life which God gives to all men. The strong reason for the latter is that this thought appears in vs. 17, 18, at the close of this chapter. The critics chiefly adopt the latter view. The former seems to me preferable, especially because he would not be likely to speak of philosophical inquiries like his as "*given to the sons of men*" to toil upon, since in fact not one in ten thousand give their minds as he did to this study. In this construction, the last clause is in apposition (parenthetically) with the "all things" that are done under the sun. He means to affirm of the "all things" that they involve a vast amount of toil imposed upon man after his fall by the ordinations of divine providence. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return unto the dust."

14. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and behold, all *is* vanity and vexation of spirit.

Beyond question this refers to the toilsome works of the race as a whole, and not to the toilsome philosophical study of their works, such as his own had been. He affirms of it that he has

found it to be all vanity and vexation of spirit, or, as the Hebrew might be more precisely rendered, a striving after wind—a fruitless and irksome labor.

15. *That which is* crooked can not be made straight: and that which is wanting can not be numbered.

The passage (chap. 7: 13) seems manifestly parallel to this, and therefore may give us a clue to the meaning here. "Consider the work of God, for who can make that straight which he hath made crooked?" In consequence of sin, God has subjected the course of nature to certain physical evils, *e. g.*, destructive storms, ruinous droughts, extremes of heat and of cold, earthquakes, pestilence, disease, death. The sense of the original words is, Who can reduce to order that which God hath put in disorder? Who can change the ordinations of his providence in the rule of earthly things? If man could do this at his own will, he might avoid many of those disasters which frustrate the wisest of human plans and overthrow the best laid schemes for earthly good.——That which is wanting *is* not, and therefore can not be taken into account. Man often finds precisely this fatal lack of the things he happens to need sufficient to frustrate his best endeavors.

16. I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all *they* that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.

17. And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.

18. For in much wisdom *is* much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

These are his reflections upon his own personal history, turning especially upon the sadness and pain which his studies of human life had occasioned him ——"I gave my heart to know madness and folly," *i. e.*, in the sense of finding out what they are good for toward the result of human happiness. He found that such studies were fraught with sorrow. The results were only a grief to his heart.

## CHAPTER II.

The writer still speaks of his personal experience. He made trial of mirth and conviviality (vs. 1, 2); of wine and folly (v. 3); of houses, gardens, servants, cattle, gold, and music (vs. 4–8) —of every thing heart could desire, but it proved only vanity (vs.

9–11). He finds wisdom far better than folly (vs. 12–14), yet such are the ordinations of Providence that both the wise man and the fool are subjected in many respects to a common destiny (vs. 14–16), which makes life and all its labors seem intensely irksome (v. 17), especially because he must leave all at death so soon and can by no means control it after his death (vs. 18–21). He concludes that all is vanity (vs. 22, 23) save the little that God gives man to enjoy in this very labor itself (vs. 24, 25). The wealth of sinners is laid up for the just, so that sinners at least labor as to themselves altogether in vain (v. 26).

1. I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also *is* vanity.

2. I said of laughter, *It is* mad: and of mirth, What doeth it?

Throughout this chapter both the forms of statement and the nature of the things said combine to show that it is precisely the personal experience of Solomon, adduced as bearing directly on the main point of the discussion, *the vanity of a pleasure-seeking life*. First, he tries mirth and hilarity; but ah! this is only vanity! His experience compels him to say of laughter, "It is mad." This Hebrew word for "mad" suggests rather that it shines with a false glare, and plays off a false splendor in which there is nothing substantial.——Of mirth he said, What can *it* do? *i. e.*, for the real good of human souls?

3. I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what *was* that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life.

The first clause plainly means that he experimented with wine, aiming to use it wisely; but the more precise sense of the Hebrew, rendered—"To give myself to wine," is very much in dispute. The Hebrew verb is in somewhat frequent use in the general sense—to draw, to draw out, to prolong. Gesenius has it—"to prolong the body; to make it durable, robust, firm; to strengthen." Hengstenberg, "I sought in my heart to nourish my flesh with wine." Rosenmueller, "to prolong the excitement of wine for the sake of greater enjoyment." Stuart finds here the figure of drawing the body as a chariot is drawn, wisdom guiding it as the charioteer does his chariot. Clearly the author means that he sought to make a very discreet and wise use of wine, to get all the physical good and all the present enjoyment from it he could with the least possible evil.——The clause rendered, "yet acquainting my heart with wisdom," is parenthetic and yields a better sense if translated more literally, thus ("my heart still leading

on with wisdom") *i. e.*, in all my use of wine I still subjected myself to the dictates of wisdom.

4. I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards:

5. I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all *kind of* fruits:

6. I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees:

7. I got *me* servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me:

8. I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings, and of the provinces: I got me men-singers and women-singers, and the delights of the sons of men, *as* musical instruments, and that of all sorts.

This is a chapter of Solomon's personal history. The reader will find much of it in its historic form in 1 Kings, 9 and 10.——He built a magnificent house (temple) for the Lord his God; one for himself; one for his Egyptian wife; another for a royal arsenal, "the house of the forest of Lebanon."——The word rendered "orchards" is *paradises, i. e.*, parks, pleasure-gardens with groves.——In v. 6, the word "wood" has the sense of *grove*, a cluster of trees, the groves in which trees were cultivated.——The last clause of v. 8, it is now generally conceded by the best critics, must have the sense—*a wife and wives*. The original words seem to have no reference whatever to musical instruments. "The delights of the sons of men" (see Cant. 7: 7) are amorous pleasures. The prominence of these pleasures in the actual life of Solomon forbids their omission in this list. Indeed their very prominent place in his life corresponds to their place in the climax here. It also appears in the history that he had one wife "par excellence," viz., the daughter of Pharaoh; and besides her, many subordinate wives.

9. So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me.

10. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labor: and this was my portion of all my labor.

11. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do: and behold, all *was* vanity and vexation of spirit, and *there was* no profit under the sun.

Here is an apparent discrepancy between v. 10 and v. 11, since in v. 10, he says—"My heart rejoiced in all my labor," but in v. 11 he looks upon all this labor and pronounces it only vanity and

vexation of spirit. Does he mean that while he was in the midst of this toil he thought himself happy; but that his more mature reflections afterward convinced him of his mistake; or this—that there was a certain measure of enjoyment in his very activities and labors; in the consciousness of power and the sense of success; and that this was precisely his portion of earthly good—all there is of it: but that when the days of acquisition were past, and he came to look back upon his accumulations of earthly good, the product of his immense toil, he found nothing but vanity and vexation? He plainly seemed to himself to have toiled for nothing. There was no profit. The things he had accumulated supposing they would be permanent sources of good, had no more happiness to give him. The little satisfaction he found in the labor itself was all they had to give. The things he had acquired proved to be emptiness and vanity. This view corresponds closely with his language. So it does also with all human experience. There is undeniably some enjoyment in the process of accumulating a great estate. Men hope they shall enjoy it exceedingly when they have gotten it, and this pleasure of hope is one item of enjoyment. The very activity itself affords health and happiness, and there is withal a cherished consciousness of power; but when the toil is over and men come to reflect on the actual profit; when they ask their own hearts—Am I now realizing those visions of hope that lured me on through my life-long labor? Alas! the conviction forces itself upon them that all this is vanity and vexation of spirit. The care of keeping safely outweighs the pleasure of using. The hope of enduring and satisfying joy is blasted.

12. And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly: for what *can* the man *do* that cometh after the king? *even* that which hath been already done.

13. Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness.

14. The wise man's eyes *are* in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all.

Somewhat changing the subject, he compares wisdom with folly. Throughout this book, wisdom is rather sagacity than piety. It is the skill which plans well for the attainment of its ends, and not, as usually in the book of Proverbs and in Job, "the fear of the Lord," and the principle of implicit obedience to his will.——I turned my attention to consider closely wisdom as compared with madness and folly. What can a man hope to accomplish coming after the king? Can he experiment more successfully? Nay; he can do only what has been done as well or better by others before him. Solomon hints that his experiment ought to be satisfactory and conclusive, since no man can succeed where he has failed.—— In the middle of v. 14, the turn of thought is strongly adversative: *but*, although wisdom is so much above folly, yet I saw that the

wise man and the fool are in some respects subjected to the same destiny. This becomes a very exceptive fact in its bearings upon the superior practical value of wisdom over folly—as he proceeds to show more fully.

15. Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also *is* vanity.

16. For *there is* no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool forever; seeing that which now *is*, in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise *man?* as the fool.

17. Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun *is* grievous unto me: for all *is* vanity and vexation of spirit.

"Saying in the heart" is thoughtful reflection, talking to one's self, and turning the matter over and over in one's mind.——As it happeneth to the fool, so it will happen to me, even to *me* (wise though I am); why then have I been so very wise? That is, what comes of it? Of what use does it prove to be to me, since in the end I must succumb to the common destiny of all mortal men, whether wise or foolish? Common to both is this inevitable oblivion that sweeps over the deeds and the life of all mankind. They will none of them be long remembered. "That which is now, in the days to come will have been long ago forgotten," and therefore be quite lost from the thought of all the living.——The last clause of v. 16 is better read as an exclamation of sadness: "And how dieth the wise man like the fool!" Alas, to think that the wise no less than the fool must die! that both are doomed to the same inevitable destiny of death!——Taking this view of the subjection of all human life to this revolting necessity of passing away from earth and being for evermore forgotten, I hated life, for all the work done under the sun appeared odious to me. My heart sickened at the thought of such death and oblivion—the unavoidable conditions of all human existence.——It need not be supposed that Solomon meant here to deny what he had said in his proverbs (chap. 14: 32) of the broad contrast in death between the wicked and the righteous: "The wicked is driven away in his wickedness; but the righteous hath hope in his death." For we may either say that his subject here did not lead him to speak of these aspects of death, or we may say that during his pleasure-loving and seeking life, his heart was drawn away from God, and for the time, he had no comfort from that hope in death which the righteous man enjoys. That is, he is here recording his own personal experiences—the thoughts that coursed through his mind in those days of his vain pursuit of earthly pleasure. These are the views he had then, and they are such as his contemplated readers, themselves far from God, should pertinently take while they are esti-

mating the inherent value of all pleasure that is merely of the earth, earthy.

18. Yea, I hated all my labor which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me.

19. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise *man* or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labor wherein I have labored, and wherein I have showed myself wise under the sun. This *is* also vanity.

20. Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labor which I took under the sun.

21. For there is a man whose labor *is* in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not labored therein shall he leave it *for* his portion. This also *is* vanity and a great evil.

Another and third fact incident to all human life and labor adds to his discontent and vexation. He can not control the fruits of his labor after he is dead. He may have wrought never so wisely: at his death all he has done or accumulated may go into the hands of some fool who has done nothing to produce this wealth, and nothing to deserve it. Who knows whether his wealth shall go, at his death, into the hands of a wise man or a fool? In this view of the contingencies of human labor, Solomon turned to make his heart despair, etc. He was strongly tempted to feel that it was all useless and fruitless. His mind turned to take this view of the matter. Alas, said he to himself, how unsubstantial, how short-lived are all my enjoyments! How soon may all that I have toiled so laboriously and so wisely to accumulate, fall into the hand of some spendthrift, perhaps the vilest of men and the laziest, and become only a curse to him, and through him to all the living world!——Alas, that the history of great estates should, in the majority of cases, be precisely this and nothing better! Plainly God would have this fact stand out before the eyes of every man who is toiling to build up a vast estate, admonishing him to give his children durable and not perishable riches—that heavenly wisdom which only blesses, rather than the earthly wealth which by itself and alone can scarcely fail of being a curse. ——It is supposable that Solomon saw developments in his son Rehoboam which suggested these reflections.

22. For what hath man of all his labor, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath labored under the sun?

23. For all his days *are* sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity.

These verses look simply at the case of the man who is toiling to amass wealth. How hard he works? How diligently he plans!

How intense are his anxieties! Sleep will not come at his bidding. Hengstenberg well translates, "For all his days are sorrow, and discontent is his plague." Truly such a life is a vanity.

24. *There is* nothing better for a man, *than* that he should eat and drink, and *that* he should make his soul enjoy good in his labor. This also I saw, that it *was* from the hand of God.

This may be read interrogatively. Is it not good for man that he eat and drink and make his soul see good in his labor? The comparative sense, "There is nothing better than," etc., is not clearly expressed in the original. Yet the ultimate sense is nearly the same either way. Substantially the same thought appears, chap. 3: 12, 13, 22 and 5: 18 and 8: 15. Solomon meant to say that the surest and the best of all the good that is properly of this world, pertaining to this mortal life, consists in the moderate enjoyment of our daily bread, and in our labor to supply these natural wants of those who are dependent upon us. So much God gives us to enjoy, and it should be accepted as his gift. These moderate enjoyments are here put in contrast with the corroding anxieties, the ever-grasping spirit and never-ceasing labors of the man who is bent on hoarding immense treasures and building up a vast estate. Solomon would say, Take the moderate enjoyment of what suffices to meet your animal wants, and desist from those infinite toils for what you can never enjoy.

25. For who can eat, or who else can hasten *hereunto*, more than I!

If we accept the Hebrew text and read "more than I," the meaning is that Solomon considers his experience of the pleasures in question entirely valid to his argument and not to be gainsayed. Who can know better than I do what the pleasures of eating amount to?——But the Septuagint and Syriac versions have the pronoun of the third person, and not of the first, giving the sense, Who can eat and who can enjoy himself without (*i. e.*, apart from) God? All are dependent on his blessing for the health which enables men to enjoy food or any animal pleasure, and also for the means of such enjoyment.——Either sense is good; the latter, very good; yet it is well to adhere to the principle of taking the Hebrew text as it stands unless the reasons for changing it are of the strongest kind.

26. For *God* giveth to a man that *is* good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to *him that is* good before God. This also *is* vanity and vexation of spirit.

The point most vital to the sense of this verse is, *What* is vanity and vexation of spirit? Of *what particular* thing does the author affirm that "*this* also is vanity?"——It is not even supposable that Solomon is thinking of the good man whom God loves, and to whom he gives the accumulated wealth of the wicked. Dismissing this, therefore, the choice lies between these two suppositions; viz., either those agencies of God in his providence which take the wicked man's stores away and give them to the good man; or the case of the wicked man himself, thus stripped of his hard-gotten wealth. It has been supposed by some that the author meant to say—It is a vanity and a vexation that God should manage human affairs on this principle. But there is no necessity of attributing a sense so revolting as this to Solomon's language. The other is therefore for every reason to be preferred and adopted.——To the wicked man it is indeed a vanity and a vexation of spirit that God lets him toil on for earthly good and amass heaps of treasure, but only to give it to the good man whom this wicked man malignantly hates. This is intensely galling and vexatious.——In favor of this construction is its harmony with the entire drift of the book. For obviously the book in whole labors to point out in detail the circumstances which make a pleasure-loving and godless life a failure and a mere vanity. In addition to many other points, here is a new one of the same general character with the rest, viz., that God gives travail and stores of wealth to the wicked, yet only that he may in the end take it away from him and give it to the righteous.——On the other hand, it is *not* in harmony with the spirit of this book to find fault with God's management of this world in his providential government. Every where the author vindicates God and justifies his ways toward men. We are therefore by no means warranted in fairness and charity to construe this passage squarely against the entire strain of all the rest of the book.——The doctrine that God gives to the good man the wealth gotten by the wicked appears not unfrequently in the Old Testament, and the fact was doubtless in some measure characteristic of that ancient economy. (See Prov. 13: 22, "The wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just.") (Also Prov. 28: 8 and Job 27: 16, 17.)

## CHAPTER III.

The central thought in vs. 1–15, I take to be that God's overruling hand in providence shapes human events so that life is full of changes and even contrasts, doings and undoings; and that consequently a vast amount of human toil is fruitless; but God would have men study his works and ways, and learn to fear him rever-

ently and obey him sincerely; desist from excessive eagerness for worldly good, and be content and happy in the moderate legitimate enjoyments which he provides.——V. 16 starts a new train of thought, beginning with the fact of cruel injustice in the administration of law, where righteousness should reign; advancing to the fact of God's righteous retribution for this sin, which sin develops intense moral brutishness, and shows that the doom of mortality to man in common with beasts is obviously righteous, for he who will live like the brutes morally should die like the brutes physically. But man's spirit, bearing higher responsibilities, must have a far different destiny. Let this also dissuade man from an intense and excessive pursuit of worldly good, and make him content with the measure of enjoyment which God designs for him, reflecting how soon he must pass away and have no more cognizance of what this world shall be after he has gone.——The chapter presents some real difficulties, and has been interpreted variously by very able critics. I give the construction which seems to me to accord best with the sense of the words and with the general scope of the book. It does not become me to speak severely of the views of others which I reject, or dogmatically of my own.

1. To every *thing there is* a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:
2. A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up *that which is* planted;
3. A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;
4. A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
5. A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
6. A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
7. A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
8. A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

The sense of the special clauses in this passage is for the most part clear. Every earthly life has its beginning and its close, both determined in the plan of God's providential rule of human affairs. Planting and plucking up are to vegetables what birth and death are to men. So killing and healing relate to man; breaking down and building up to cities and the great works of human art and labor. Weeping and mourning come of calamity; but laughing

and dancing express good fortune and joy. "Casting forth stones" (v. 5) was practiced by an enemy to injure arable lands for cultivation. Thus Israel treated the best lands of Moab. God said, "Ye shall smite every fenced city and shall fell every good tree and stop all wells of water and *mar* every good piece of land with stones." "And they beat down the city, and on every good piece of land they cast every man his stone and filled it," etc. (2 Kings 3: 19, 25).——But after the special sense of each clause is ascertained, the more vital question still remains: What is the bearing of the whole passage? What is the real significance of this list of contrasted events?——First, it is obviously *not* the writer's object to group together a list of *moral duties*. He does not mean to say that these things are lawful and right, while other things are forbidden and ought not to be done. He does not mean to say that it is right to dance and right to laugh; right to kill and right to cure; right to go to war and right to make peace. Nor does he mean to say that these things, though sometimes wrong, are yet right at *certain seasons*—their moral right or wrong turning upon the circumstances under which they are done. This would be more plausible than the former supposition; but even this I judge to be entirely foreign from the author's meaning, and quite useless for moral instruction without some light upon the *circumstances* which are to make these various things right or wrong.—— Affirmatively, I understand him to say simply that this world is so governed providentially under God's hand that these unlike events are in fact constantly occurring and have their place in the completed history of human affairs. They actually occur in the routine of human life, yet are thought of here rather in their relation to the agency and purpose of God in them than as related to the moral agency of man. In the divine ordering of human affairs there is perpetual doing and undoing. Life is full of changes and even reverses. A man is rich to-day and poor to-morrow; in health to-day, in sickness and death to-morrow; now in peace, anon in war; now joyful in prosperity, soon mourning in bitter adversity. And these extreme changes in the mortal lot of mankind come of the purposes and ways of God's providence in his moral discipline of our race. He breaks up the smooth and even tenor of man's earthly life for the sake of turning his eye upward to the overruling hand that shapes all. This is indicated particularly in v. 14, "God doeth it that men should fear before him."——As intimated already, these frequent changes, coming in a way that baffles and defies the best foresight of men, have a most vital bearing on the pursuit of human happiness—especially on that pleasure-seeking pursuit which makes earthly good its supreme and sole end. How vain it must be for man to toil thus intensely to *do* when God's order of things in this world involves so much perpetual *undoing*?

9. What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboreth?

10. I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it.

These two verses give in part the author's moral application of vs. 1–8, as above explained. What profit can the worker have, however long and hard his toil, in a world where such reverses are the common law of human life. How easily can an adverse providence undo all that his toilsome life has done!

11. He hath made every *thing* beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.

The first clause is plain, referring, however, not to God's works of creation, but rather to his works in providence, the same which are sketched in vs. 1–8, and therefore is better rendered *done* than "made." In this endless shifting of human scenes, God has always done every thing well in its *time*—this word "time" here looking back to its use in vs. 1–8. Working with the noblest ends and guiding his work with infinite wisdom, he evermore doeth all things beautifully, yea, infinitely well.——The second clause demands our special attention. Critics have explained it variously. The translators of the English version seem to have understood it to say that though God had made all things so beautifully, yet he had put such love of the world into the hearts of men that they can not find out his works thoroughly in all their relations and bearings. But this sense is too revolting to be accepted. We must not attribute man's love of the world to God as if it were his gift to man—much less still as given for *such a purpose*, viz.: that man might not be able to understand God's works thoroughly. Fortunately there is not the least occasion to give the words a sense so repugnant to both Scripture and reason.——It may interest the reader to see some of the various constructions given to this passage.——The writer on Ecclesiastes in Smith's Bible Dictionary gives the doctrine of the verse thus: "The heart of man with its changes is the mirror of the universe, and is, like that, inscrutable." Rosenmueller translates it: "He hath done all things beautifully, each in its own time, and although he hath implanted in their mind a sense of eternity, yet they do not attain to the knowledge of the whole work of God from the beginning even to the end." Hengstenberg thus: "He maketh every thing beautiful in his time; eternity also hath he put in their heart so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end." Prof. Stuart thus: "Every thing hath he made beautiful in its season; moreover, he hath put intelligence in their heart without which no man can find out the work that God doeth from beginning to end." Prof. S. changes the text in the case of the word rendered in the English version the "world," but by Rosenmueller

and Hengstenberg "eternity." Such a change should in my judgment never be made, except under an imperative necessity and on some adequate authority, neither of which exist here. Besides, it is very tame and inept to say that without intelligence [the intellectual faculty] no man can understand "the *whole work of God from beginning to end.*" There is not the least occasion to state so specially and emphatically that man can not know *every thing* about God without intelligence, when obviously he could not begin to understand the first and simplest thing about God without an intellectual faculty, *i. e.*, without the power of knowing something.

The test words in the passage are two: that which is translated in our English version, "the world," and by others "eternity;" and the particles which follow it, rendered "so that," or "without which." I translate, "God hath done [and is ever doing] every thing beautifully in its season; also he hath put eternity in their heart without which man will not [or can not] find out the work that God doeth from beginning to end." That is, he hath given man the thought or idea of eternity, and without its aid no man could ever understand these works of God in providence in all their just and far reaching relations. For, these providential agencies of God in their plans and results, reach onward into eternity. They lap over from this world into the next, unfinished here, to be completed there. Retribution for the deeds of earth, beginning sometimes here, is to be finished there. The frustration of human plans for time has an outlook to the hopeful compensations of eternity. "These light afflictions which are but for a moment work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," and therefore are wise in God's plan and well for his children. Hence there is no understanding the ways of God here save as you take into the account their bearings upon the destiny that awaits men there.——This doctrine all must admit to be true, and its significance in this connection most admirable; but the questions will arise, Is it not too good to fit the times and the pen of Solomon? Postponing this question to a later stage of this discussion, I ask, Is this the legitimate and precise sense of his words? I think so most decidedly.——As already suggested, the first test word is the somewhat common one in Hebrew, rendered the "world," or "eternity" [olam]. In the sense of *world* this word occurs nowhere in the Old Testament. On this point the best critics seem now to be agreed. But in the sense of *eternity, i. e.*, long indefinite time, it occurs very frequently, and in this book of Ecclesiastes five times: viz.: chap. 1: 4 and 2: 16 and 3: 14 and 9: 6 and 12: 5. Such testimony to this point ought to suffice.——The next words would read literally: "From [or because of] the absence or non-existence of which, man will not find out, etc., the plain sense of which is *without which; i. e.*, on the supposition that man had not this idea of eternity, he would not, or could not, find out the work that God doeth, here in his providence, from beginning to end. This is the first and most obvious sense of the original words.——Let it be added moreover that all the other words

in this passage conspire to sustain this interpretation. The first word "also," implies something more of the same sort. This corresponds with the construction which I suggest. God hath done two things of kindred bearing and significance, viz.: (1.) He hath done every thing in his providence most beautifully and fitly in its time; (2.) He hath *also* put in man's heart the idea of eternity, without which man could not find out either the wisdom or the love of these works of God's providence from beginning to end —another gift to man quite analogous to the former gift of a well-ordered course of providence. First, to ordain a course of providential dealings wisely; and, secondly, to give man the idea of eternity so that he can understand what would otherwise seem to him inexplicable and perhaps unjust—these two things complement each other and fill out the plan of God for revealing himself and his ways to men.——It might be added that the Hebrew word rendered "set" ("set the world, etc.,") is in Hebrew *give;* the same verb from which the writer takes the noun "gift"—"it is the *gift* of God." (See below v. 13 and chap. 5: 19.) He must, therefore, have thought of it as a blessing, and not a thing put into their heart to forestall their knowledge of his ways and to render it impossible.——Further, the words rendered in the English version "so that," and which express the relation between God's giving man the idea of eternity and man's not finding out God's works perfectly, have for their first and legitimate sense, *without which.* That is, without this idea of eternity, man neither will nor can find out God's work fully. To render this (with Hengstenberg and the English version) "so that," imputes to God the design of making his ways unintelligible to man—a design squarely opposed to every thing we know of God through his works and his word—not to say also to the very fact that he reveals himself in a written revelation at all. For why has he done this if indeed it be his purpose *not* to let us understand his ways and works?——Moreover, to render this connecting particle with Rosenmueller: "*Although* God has given man the idea of eternity, *yet* he does not fully understand God," is to force a sense upon the passage, and not to find a sense in it, or to bring a sense out of it. For in the words which the author uses there is nothing to justify this sense.——Finally, the construction above suggested and defended corresponds admirably with the qualifying clause, "find out the work that God doeth *from the beginning to the end.*" For, without the idea of eternity, man might find out some of God's works and ways, at least in some of their bearings and relations. But those methods of God's providential government over men which embrace the moral discipline of suffering here, correlated to glorious compensation there; or his long-suffering endurance with sin here, to be set right at last by swift and just retribution there, can by no means be understood by the human mind save with the aid of this idea of eternity. Whenever we take in the whole range of those far-reaching plans of God which stretch "from the beginning to the end," we must have eternity in

our hearts; and hence he has given it.——Thus every several point; I might say, every *word* of this passage, harmonizes admirably with the construction above given, leaving, it would seem, nothing more in the way of sustaining proof to be desired.—— More than two years after the above was written, I had opportunity to examine the commentaries of McDonald (J. M. McDonald of Princeton, N. J.) and of Wordsworth (Arch-deacon of Westminster). The former translates as I have done; the latter thus: "He hath set eternity in their heart so that man can not find out the works of God from the beginning to the end."——McDonald alone of all the critics that have fallen under my eye has given what I regard as the true sense of the passage.

12. I know that *there is* no good in them, but for a *man* to rejoice, and to do good in his life.

13. And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labor, it *is* the gift of God.

By general consent of critics, the word translated "in them," means, *for men, i. e.*, "in" has the sense of *for* and "them" refers to men. "There is no good for the race of men in this world but to rejoice," etc.——The question has been raised whether "to do good" (last clause of v. 12) means precisely doing good to others, or getting good to one's self. Prof. Stuart pleads for the latter, citing in its support the supposed parallel passages in this author (2: 24 and 3: 22 and 5: 17 and 8: 15 and 9: 7), in none of which however do we find the same words, "doing good." Better is the sense given by Gesenius, viz., doing right; living uprightly and well, according to the laws of one's being and relations to God and men. This is obviously the meaning of these identical words in Ps. 34: 15—"Depart from evil and *do good*;" and in Ps. 37: 3: "Trust in the Lord and *do good*;" and in Isa. 38: 3: "Remember, O Lord, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart and have *done good* in thy sight."——He who does good in this sense subserves the happiness of both others and himself. And beyond all question this is a just view of what human life should be—a life joyful, tranquil, right-doing.——V. 13 recognizes the fact that God has provided for us sources of physical enjoyment in our daily bread, and in the consciousness of power and success in producing desired results. These are *gifts* of God to men. An infinite Father to us, he delights to see his children enjoying his bounty, and with humble acknowledgment and grateful love, exercising the powers of labor and acquisition which he has bestowed. A just sense of our relations and obligations to God will guard us against the gross and grievous mistake of living to eat and drink, and thus of eating and drinking so as to debase ourselves even below irrational animals. Hence while commending the moderate enjoyments of our constitutional appetites, Solomon continually suggests the thought that these enjoyments come to us from God, our Great

Father, and are the fruits of his divine economy in the creation of man.

14. I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever; nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it; and God doeth *it*, that *men* should fear before him.

Here also, as throughout the previous part of this chapter, "whatsoever God doeth" looks to his works and ways in his providential government of our world. In all these, his great principles and plans are changeless, and especially are they supreme and sovereign in the sense of being beyond the reach and control of mortals. And God rules thus with supreme authority and with a wisdom all his own and a steadfastness of purpose that no created being can change, *in order that men may fear before him.* Such glorious majesty and such immutability in wisdom, justice, and love, become the infinite throne of the universe. It is altogether well that the universe has such a Father—such a Ruler—such a God!

15. That which has been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.

This verse expands the thought that God's plans of governing the world and shaping its events remain forever the same.—— The first clause might be rendered more closely—"That which is now was also long ago, and that which is to be was also long since;" *i. e.*, there is nothing new under the sun. What we see to-day and what generations to come are yet to see, has been occuring through all past ages.——"God requireth that which is past," seems to mean that he calls it forth again to reproduce it—to give it another and yet another place in the successive scenes of earth. He is perpetually reënacting the events of the past, not indeed in their precise external forms, but in their essential principles and purposes.

16. And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, *that* wickedness *was* there; and the place of righteousness, *that* iniquity *was* there.

While God's providential government of this world is perfect, man's administration of civil government has often been fearfully imperfect. Every broad and comprehensive view of human history takes in some illustrations of this sad fact. Whoever looks carefully into the place where just judgment should be will find that wickedness is there. The very men whom God has clothed with the power and the functions requisite for the authoritative administration of justice are lending themselves to the most shameful injustice, "framing iniquity by law," or, as the case may be, sub-

verting good laws under corrupting influences and for bad ends. The world has always been full of this. Solomon saw it in all those adjacent countries with which his political and commercial relations had made him acquainted. This fact sustains exceedingly important relations to God's moral government over men, and therefore is by no means foreign to the general scope of this chapter.

17. I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for *there is* a time there for every purpose and for every work.

When I saw this shocking injustice perpetrated by the very men whom God had made specially responsible for the protection of the defenseless and for the administration of justice, I said, God will surely set this matter right on the score of justice. He will judge both those righteous sufferers and their wicked oppressors.——It can scarcely be doubted that this passage, like the last verses of the book, refer in part at least to the final and universal judgment.——If we follow the Hebrew text and read, "a time *there*," we must understand the word "there" to be a tacit allusion to the final judgment scene as to a great fact familiar to the writer's mind, and therefore not requiring a more specific description. Prof. Stuart prefers a very slight change in a single letter by which the word becomes a verb with the sense, *appoint;* thus, "Because a time for every purpose and for every work he hath appointed;" *i. e.*, a time to judge every purpose and work. But without greater necessity for it, it can not be wise to change the original text.

18. I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts.

It is difficult to trace the course of thought here. I suggest the following as best meeting the demands of the context and the sense of the words used, and paraphrase thus: "I said in my heart (a further reflection upon the fact brought out in vs. 16, 17) it is because of the sons of men—for their sake—that God may prove them and that they may see that in themselves they are morally brutish, acting like the beasts."——The received version leaves the sense suspended and incomplete. *What* that is which is done in order "that God might manifest them," is not said. This thought needs to be supplied. I assume that it must be found in v. 16, viz., in the fearful and horrible wickedness of civil rulers. God suffers this to develop itself in order to reveal the awful depravity of the race and to show men that they are worse than brutish morally in this horrid perversion of the functions of civil authority which are entrusted to them for the ends of justice, and which they abuse to purposes of most

flagrant injustice. God made man with exalted mental and moral powers; but alas! how has he fallen! God clothed him with the responsible functions of civil government over his fellows; alas, that he should have abused them so outrageously! In view of such a moral fall, it is only fitting that mortality and death should be the earthly destiny of all the race. Since man will debase his soul to the state of a beast intellectually and morally, why should not God doom his body to the destiny of a beast physically?

19. For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast: for all *is* vanity.

20. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.

The word "for" assumes that it is even so. One common law of physical mortality reigns over both man and beast. Each alike receive their bodies from the dust of the earth, and give them back to their mother earth. Considered closely with reference to this part of our being, man has no preëminence above a beast. This close construction is obviously demanded by the course of thought;—"all go to one place"—the earth; all are made of dust and all return to it again. This must refer to the body only.

21. Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?

This passage does not deny but on the contrary affirms that the spirit of man goes upward to God who gave it, while the spirit of beasts goes downward to the earth, becoming (as the passage seems to imply) extinct with the dissolution of the body. But in the words "Who knoweth?" the writer assumes that many things respecting the spirit of man and the spirit of beasts were yet unknown. The subject lies beyond the range of our personal experience while yet we remain in this mortal state. There are more things to be known in respect to the "going up" of the one and the "going down" of the other than any human mind has yet attained. Hence the fitness of the language, "Who knoweth?" With the same words, the Psalmist (Ps. 90: 11) asks; "Who knoweth the power of thine anger?" How can mortals adequately appreciate its power and its effects?——A somewhat different construction with a widely diverse sense is given by Prof. Stuart, thus;—"Who knoweth the spirit of the sons of men whether it ascendeth upward, and the spirit of beasts whether it descendeth downward to the earth?" He supposes the author to have had before him the idea of the future existence of the soul, but at this time, to have been doubtful as to the truth of it. He

finds support for this construction in the ancient versions, the Septuagint, Vulgate, Syriac, and Arabic, and has with him all the Neological critics, for they have a permanent propensity to deny to the writers of the Old Testament all knowledge of a future state.——The reply to Prof. Stuart is that the Hebrew punctuation is against him, and that the sentiment expressed in his construction conflicts with the author's views elsewhere given, and no less with the doctrine of man's creation and destiny as given in Genesis, viz., that the body, taken from the dust, returns to dust again to meet its destiny of dissolution; but the spirit, being the breath of God, (Gen. 2: 7) returns to God, its author, to meet its destiny of moral retribution. It seems plain that the ancient people of God had from the first (and never lost) this general idea, that the souls of the good at death return to God to dwell in his presence with all who have gone before in purity and blessedness. See Ps. 17: 15 and 16: 11 and 73: 24, 25 and Gen. 15: 15 and 25: 8 and 49: 29, 33 and 37: 35, which last passage shows that this being gathered to one's people was not merely the burial of the body in a common grave.* Inasmuch as this is the obvious and usual sense of Solomon's words in this passage, and inasmuch as he certainly avows this sentiment in his last chapter, it must be reasonable to assume that this is his meaning here; and very unreasonable to make him contradict himself by forcing a sense upon his words against which they rebel.

22. Wherefore I perceive that *there is* nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that *is* his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?

Here we have the sentiments of vs. 12, 13 repeated and still enforced by the inferences drawn from the brevity of human life

* It may be due to Prof. Stuart to say that both in this case and in many others he finds skeptical sentiments expressed in this book and accounts for them in two ways, viz., as suggested by a supposed objector and then answered by the author; or as the earlier views of the author, but corrected subsequently by his better heart and consequent better light. The difficulty with these suppositions is that the author gives no hint of the presence of a supposed objector, distinct from himself, and no hint of any subsequent change in his own views. He does not say, I thought wrong in chap. 3, but give my corrected views in chap. 12. This fact should have weight, and yet, if the book seems to require to be construed as a "confession" in the broad sense of a recital of personal experiences and of the varying phases of his views on moral questions, then a diversity of views between one part of the book and another may be admitted, even although the writer makes no special allusion to such change.——On another point Prof. Stuart leaves us quite in the dark. Holding as he does that the author of the book is not Solomon himself but some nameless and unknown writer after the captivity, he fails to tell us whether these skeptical views were given by the author as being Solomon's or his own. Perhaps it did not occur to him that the theory of a forged authorship for a book of confessions—a detail of heart-thoughts and experiences—must labor heavily. It is utterly against nature. Who else ever attempted to write out a heart-history for another man, five hundred years dead, with no autobiographical help at hand?

and from the fact that at death man passes away forever from the scenes of earth.——"What shall be after him" obviously refers to this world after he has left it, and not to the next after he shall have entered it. The things he can not know are not his future destiny in the world to come, but rather the destiny of what he leaves behind him as the fruit of all his toil in this world. The parallel passage (6: 12) has it, "For who can tell a man what shall be after him *under the sun?*"——The conclusions to which the author arrives at the various stages of his argument show clearly that a secondary point, subordinate to his main theme—the vanity of earthly pleasure—was *the real good which God does give man to enjoy in this mortal state.* Remarkably he carries along these two great themes—how to abuse the world and make it a worthless vanity, and how to use it so as to get its real good most effectively.

## CHAPTER IV.

Here are illustrative cases of failure in the pursuit of earthly good: the oppressed (vs. 1–3); the successful but envied man (v. 4); the fool (v. 5); the man of great toil and anxiety (v. 6); the miserly and solitary (vs. 7–12); kings on unstable thrones, whether old and foolish, or young, popular and then unpopular (vs. 13–16).

1. So I returned and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of *such as were* oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors *there was* power; but they had no comforter.

For the most part, Solomon, in this book, contemplates and addresses the rich and the noble who have high aspirations for worldly pleasure, and large means (to human view) for attaining it. But these verses form an exception, in part, *i. e.*, they speak of and contemplate the poor, yet are *addressed*, for aught that appears, to those in high life. These oppressed ones are not princes, but subjects; are not men of wealth, but men of poverty. Any just view of human life as a whole must include the masses—those millions in almost every age and every country who have been wretchedly misgoverned and grievously oppressed. Solomon saw these masses in all the outlying countries with which his political and commercial relations brought him into contact. There is not the least occasion therefore to infer from these allusions to oppression, that, since there was no such oppression among his people during his reign, therefore this book must have been written after the captivity, when the Jews were somewhat subject to a foreign power. For the writer gives no

hint that these oppressions were among his own people, the Jews. ——These allusions to the oppressed are beautifully appropriate and touching—every way worthy of the heart of Solomon in his better days. It is to be feared that in his most apostate days, he lost somewhat this tender regard for the tears of the oppressed, and took little heed of his own exactions upon his people and of the grievances under which they suffered.

2. Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead, more than the living which are yet alive.

3. Yea, better *is he* than both they, which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.

The second verse commends the state of the dead as better than that of the living who are suffering under grievous oppression. In v. 3 the italicised words—"*is he*"—are so located as to darken the real sense, which is—yea, better than both (*i. e.*, both those who live under oppression, and the dead), is he who is yet unborn, who has as yet had no sense of the evil that is done under the sun. It should have been arranged thus: Yea, better than both is he that hath not yet been born, etc. Of the three classes, the living, the dead, and the yet unborn—the condition of the latter is adjudged the best.

4. Again, I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbor. This *is* also vanity and vexation of spirit.

This is the case of the successful man of business. The phrase, translated, "right work," should rather have been *successful work*, managed skilfully and accompanied with good fortune so as to ensure the best results. For this a man is envied of his neighbor. And this envy detracts very seriously from the enjoyment of good fortune and success. It brought Solomon to the conclusion; This, too, makes wealth a vanity and a vexation of spirit.

5. The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh.

Over against the wise manager and successful worker stands the fool who manages badly and lives indolently. He eats up his estate and starves himself. Passages in the Book of Proverbs show that Solomon had neither respect, sympathy, nor pity for this class of men. (See Prov. 6: 9–11 and 24: 30–34.)

6. Better *is* a handful *with* quietness, than both the hands full *with* travail and vexation of spirit.

Better is one hand full, with quietness, than both hands full, with unrest and vexation. When a man has too much for his mind to manage and his hands to keep without corroding anxiety,

he has too much for his enjoyment and best good. His wealth, whether little or much, becomes a real curse. No living man can afford to endure such unrest and vexation for the sake of being rich. Very many rich men wear out life prematurely and deny themselves almost all the common enjoyments of life through having both hands full, with travail and vexation of spirit. Alas! what a comment on the miseries of wealth and on the folly of its too eager pursuit!——This passage is remarkably in harmony with the scope of the entire book. Throughout the author commends the moderate amount of earthly good which man needs and can really enjoy, but does not commend the abundance and superfluity which goes far beyond the supply of all legitimate wants. This corresponds with his main purpose of guarding his readers against the pernicious influence of his own example in seeking worldly pleasure and in making immense accumulations of what men please to call worldly good.

7. Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun.

8. There is one *alone*, and *there is* not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother: yet *is there* no end of all his labor; neither is his eye satisfied with riches: neither *saith he*, For whom do I labor, and bereave my soul of good? This *is* also vanity, yea, it *is* a sore travail.

This is the case of a miserly recluse, solitary in the world, with no son and no brother, and, of course, no wife or daughter; who yet toils excessively, and has not the wisdom and the good sense to ask himself—*For whom* am I wearing out my life and denying myself life's real good?——There are some such men in every age, too fearful of being drawn upon for others' good to put themselves in any close relations to society; content to deny themselves the best solace of human woe and the best comforts of human life lest they be required to minister to others' happiness beyond what their selfish hearts choose to bear. It is but fitting that their lot should be hard. Solomon very justly accounts it a sore travail. In the constitution of human nature, and in the laws of human society, our Maker made no provision for any very desirable happiness in such a life. It is simply human selfishness outwitting itself, overdoing to the damage of its own interests.

9. Two *are* better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor.

10. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but wo to him *that is* alone when he falleth; for *he hath* not another to help him up.

11. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm *alone?*

12. And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

The case of the recluse suggests by contrast these remarks in praise of the closest union of friendship. It is not good for man to be alone in the journey of life. Let him always have a next friend at hand if he fall to help him rise—himself meanwhile the next friend of his companion to minister in like manner to every need. The doctrine of the passage was probably intended to apply to lawful marriage—the union of one man and one woman; perhaps also to business partnerships, and in general to the closer intimacies and friendships of human life in which the ministries of affection and of aid are mutual and mutually beneficent.

13. Better *is* a poor and a wise child, than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished.

The remaining verses in this chapter give the mutations of earthly life as seen in the case of kings. Here also we may see that wisdom is better far than folly: wisdom in the sense of sagacity; folly as manifesting itself in egregious self-conceit and stolid ignorance. ——Better is a child, poor but wise, than a king, old [and rich withal] but foolish, who knows not to be any more enlightened; *i. e.*, who is past being taught—past learning any thing—being too wise in his own conceit to be ever really any wiser.

14. For out of prison he cometh to reign; whereas also *he that is* born in his kingdom becometh poor.

For [this poor boy] comes forth, like Joseph in Egypt, from prison to a throne, but even the one born to a kingdom becomes impoverished—*i. e.*, stripped of all his regal honors and with them of his wealth. This is the hereditary heir to the kingdom. He goes down to poverty, while the diligent, sagacious young man rises from obscurity to regal honor.——Prof. Stuart, less aptly, renders the last clause—"For in his own kingdom he was born a poor man"—assuming that it refers to the successful youth and not to the dethroned dotard.

15. I considered all the living which walk under the sun, with the second child that shall stand up in his stead.

16. *There is* no end of all the people, *even* of all that have been before them: they also that come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also *is* vanity and vexation of spirit.

The same case but in still changing aspects. "I have seen all the living who walk beneath the sun *with*" [the emphatic word, meaning, in harmony with, and following in his train as his adorers] *with* this second son (not the first-born, legitimate heir) who comes into the place of the first-born, the lawful heir; standing up as king instead of him. That is, I have seen the order of primogeniture set aside, and the second son supersede the first-born and ascend the throne in his stead. And all people in the wide realm followed in his train to shout their welcome homage. The number of people—"all the living"—indicates that his eye

is on the case of those vast, world-wide empires, Egypt or Assyria, which at various periods held sway over the greater part of the then known world.——V. 16 gives the reverse side of the picture. First, there is no end to the masses who throng his train—even to all before whom he is an idolized king; but, mark the change! the after-coming ones—the next vast throng—rejoice not in him. They shout for some other candidate; give their homage to some other aspirant; and then the former, however popular in his short day, goes down, to give place to his successor. Surely this also is vanity.—So changeful and unstable are the fortunes of kings. So precarious is the best footing on human thrones! In the wide range of his observation Solomon had seen the utter vanity of the wealth and honor and glory of human kingdoms.—— Some critics tax their ingenuity to identify the particular kings to whom they suppose Solomon referred in this passage. To little purpose, however. If he had told us who they were we should know; but since he has not, it avails little to conjecture. It is by no means certain that he meant to restrict his allusion to any one set of historic facts. The poor but wise boy coming out of prison to power all but regal, corresponds so well to the case of Joseph that I have ventured to suggest him as probably in the writer's thought. More than this is too purely conjectural to be of any value. Facts of this kind occur often enough, and the practical lesson is good without names, or specially defined and historic cases.

Some critics are entirely positive that in vs. 13–16 they find Jeroboam, "the poor and wise child" (v. 13) "coming out of prison [in Egypt] to reign (v. 14); "the second child followed by all the living (v. 15); yet not rejoiced in by those that come after;" (v. 16). Also they find Solomon himself in the "old and foolish king" (v. 13), and Rehoboam in the one "born to a kingdom," yet "becoming poor".(v. 14).——I have no taste for such conjectures; at best they bring us no profit. Considered as solutions of an enigma, they are in this case a failure; there are too many unfitting points: *e. g.*, that Solomon should write himself "an old and foolish king, past being wiser; that Rehoboam should be described as "becoming poor" rather than as half dethroned; that the words "I considered" (v. 15) need to be explained of prophetic vision rather than of personal observation—the sense they always bear in this book; that "all the living" are said to have followed Jeroboam (quite too strong); that the words "the second child" should need to be forced upon him; and finally that he should lose all favor with the people before his death—never a fact.

## CHAPTER V.

This chapter treats miscellaneously, of irreverence in the worship of God (v. 1); of rash vows (vs. 2–7); of oppression and of retribution therefor (v. 8); of riches and of the vanity of their excessive pursuit (vs. 9–17), and of the propriety and wisdom of using the good things of the world with moderation, and as gifts from God (vs. 18–20).

1. Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.

"Keep thy foot," etc., enjoins that the very approach to the house of God should be with reverence, even as the Lord said to Moses—"Draw not nigh hither; put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (Ex. 3: 6). ——*Draw near* to hear, is precisely the sense of the second clause, and exhorts the worshipers to enter the inner court where the priests were accustomed to read the law, and to listen there to this reading as better than to remain without, feasting in a merely sensual way on the portions of their slain animals which in certain forms of sacrifice were designated for this purpose. These professed worshipers really acted the part of fools in neglecting to hear the word of God and in resorting to the temple only for the sake of these low forms of sensual gratification. Solomon says of them—"They are reckless as to the doing of evil." They seem to have no thought or care how much they sin.——Prof. Stuart renders the last words—"They know not how to be sad;" *i. e.*, they are altogether averse to proper sorrow for sin and do not frequent the temple for the sake of humbling themselves before God penitently and imploring his pardon. *Doing evil* is the legitimate sense of the original.——That the priests taught the people out of the law and, naturally, at the temple, appears from Deut. 33: 10: "They shall teach Jacob thy judgments and Israel thy law;" and from Micah 3: 11: "The priests teach for hire;" and Mal. 2: 7: For the priests' lips should keep knowledge; and they should seek the law from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts." To obtain this knowledge through the priests was therefore always a matter of the utmost consequence, not restricted indeed to the temple as to location, yet never inappropriate there.——That a portion of certain sacrifices was customarily eaten in a social way by the offerer and his friends appears in such passages as 1 Sam. 9: 12, 13 and 20: 29. This part of the temple service had special attractions for the sensual and morally reckless, and was by them most shamefully perverted and abused.——Some of the critics who insist that this book was not written till long after the restoration from Babylon suppose they find confirmation in the circumstance that Malachi rebukes sim-

ilar sins, and also that during Solomon's reign the temple worship was never abused in this way. But such perversions are not very extraordinary in any age. As suggested in the general introduction, the great splendor which in Solomon's reign was suddenly thrown round the temple worship would naturally attract thousands who had no hearty reverence for God and no desire to hear his law, but only to indulge their curiosity and their social and animal propensities. Such cases must have been perpetually before the eye of Solomon. Especially in the latter part of his reign it is morally certain that a great decline in national piety had taken place—else the people of the ten tribes could not have accepted so readily the edict of Jeroboam, requiring them to worship his calves.

The fact that here are seven verses (1–7) referring to attendance upon the house of God, to prayer and to vows under the Hebrew law, may appear to some to be an objection to the view given in the Introduction of the special design of this book, viz., that it was adapted somewhat particularly to the case of foreigners who had been Solomon's admirers and followers. To this objection I reply: (1.) I do not hold that the book was designed for foreigners *exclusively*. It was open to Hebrews as well. (2.) One class of his contemplated readers of foreign birth, viz., his numerous wives and their friends, were located near the temple. To them, this passage was specially appropriate. (3.) Naturally, Solomon might have been more than willing that foreign princes and merchants should know his views in respect to the reverence due to the Great God, in respect to prayers also and vows. These remarks might suggest to them the wide contrast between Jehovah and their own idol gods. (4.) If in addition to these points, it be further considered that this passage is quite aside from the main course of thought and argument in this book, and that there is nothing else of the same sort, it can not be regarded as an objection to the theory that in the main Solomon contemplated readers of foreign birth and adapted his argument to their case.

2. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter *any* thing before God: for God *is* in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.

3. For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice *is known* by multitude of words.

This language might apply pertinently either to words of prayer, or to the words used in the solemn vow. Inasmuch as prayers and vows were naturally blended together, it is quite legitimate to consider both as involved here. This caution applies to all words addressed to God. A multitude of words, poured out irreverently and without serious thought, is compared to the incoherent and unmeaning fancies of dreams when the mind has been overborne with business and cares. In no such manner and spirit should men approach the Great God. Let them rather think of him as filling

the highest heavens and yet as condescending in his great compassion to bend his ear thence to the humble prayer of mortals. Let them, therefore, approach his mercy-seat with profoundest gratitude and reverential awe, blended, indeed, with a filial but never a reckless spirit.——This precept can not legitimately be construed to forbid the free use of as many words as may be necessary to express our wants or to give free utterance to the real longings of our burdened hearts. "Vain repetitions," which are both the index and the expression of an irreverent heart, are rightly forbidden.

4. When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for *he hath* no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed.

5. Better *is it* that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.

The Mosaic Institutes permitted and regulated these solemn vows. (See Num. 30 throughout, and Deut. 23: 21–23.) The latter passage is fully in harmony with these words of Solomon. "When thou shalt vow a vow unto the Lord thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it; for the Lord thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee. But if thou shalt forbear to vow, it shall be no sin in thee," etc. The history of the Lord's people, both before and after Moses, gives us cases of such vows. The reader will recall the case of Jacob before (Gen. 29: 20–22), and of Hannah after (1 Sam. 1: 11).——Solomon applies the term "fools" to those who vow recklessly and care not to perform their vows.

6. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it *was* an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?

In this somewhat difficult passage I understand the mouth to be named as the organ of speech in making vows, and in irreverent prayers. "Flesh" is used for the entire person with special reference to the body because under the Mosaic system the punishment for rash and unperformed vows fell naturally upon the *body* of the offender. The word rendered "cause to sin," probably means here to *involve in guilt*, with special reference to its consequences, *i. e.*, punishment. It can not be supposed that the flesh itself, considered as distinct and apart from the mind, can *sin*. But it can *suffer* for sin; and this is probably the meaning here. Let not thy mouth rashly involve thy entire person in guilt and consequent suffering. ——The "angel" here is doubtless the priest, so called because in a sense the *messenger* of God—the agent acting for God—in the matter of vows especially, and of sacrifices and divine worship generally. See his agency in the case of vows, in Lev. 27: 1–25. The same term is applied to the priest in Mal. 2: 7. "For he is

the messenger [angel] of the Lord of Hosts."——"Say not, it was an error;" *i. e.*, an inadvertence; a sin of ignorance—with reference to the broad distinction made in the Mosaic law between sins of inadvertence on the one hand, and presumptuous, deliberate and daring sins on the other. See this distinction fully drawn out (Num. 15: 22–31). The spirit of the admonition here is—Do not make a rash vow, and then resort to this plea of inadvertence to excuse or extenuate your guilt or justify non-fulfillment. Rather consider beforehand and act deliberately. Make no solemn vow without a serious purpose to perform it. When made, see that you do perform it faithfully. Why should you provoke the displeasure of Almighty God by your rash words and your guilty irreverence, and so bring down his judgments upon the work of your hands?——"The work of your hands," *i. e.*, the fruits of your labor, refer naturally to the products of the field. If these had been pledged to God in the solemn vow, and then guiltily withheld, God would bring his curse upon them, sending his judgments as usual so in the line of their sin as to show them why he scourged them.

7. For in the multitude of dreams and many words *there are* also *divers* vanities: but fear thou God.

The sense of this verse is better given by a more precise translation, introducing in brackets what is implied, thus: "For in multiplying dreams and vanities and words excessively, [you expose yourself to this destruction]; but fear thou God." Men are in peril when they talk too much, and especially when they speak rashly and thoughtlessly before God. The precept of wisdom in this case is, *Fear thou God.* Let a deep and wholesome reverence toward God possess thy soul and guard thy tongue against rash words before him.

8. If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for *he that is* higher than the highest regardeth; and *there be* higher than they.

The last clause of this verse I would translate—"For one who is higher than this high one is observing, and the Most High is over them both;"—the meaning of which is that a higher officer is over this oppressive magistrate, taking cognizance of his acts; and the Most High God is over both of them, so that if the superior human ruler fails to bring his subordinate to account, the Great God will punish them both.——This oppression is supposed to occur in "*the province*," where subordinate officers would naturally be in charge. Within the range of Solomon's extensive acquaintance in the east, such abuses of power in civil magistrates were no doubt exceedingly common. He says—Do not marvel at it, nor think that this horrible iniquity will pass unpunished. The

Great God is never blind to the wrongs which unjust magistrates inflict upon their people. If the king who places them in power does not call them to account, God surely will.

9. Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king *himself* is served by the field.

This verse is difficult and has been interpreted quite variously. Stuart translates it—"Moreover an advantage of a land in all this is, a king to a cultivated field." He assumes a close connection with the preceding verse, thus: Whereas many public officers are so oppressive upon the laboring classes as to discourage and almost preclude agriculture, it is a great advantage to a country to have a king who cares for and insures the cultivation of the fields.——Hengstenberg renders it: "And the advantage of the earth is in all; a king to the cultivated field." This cultivated field he takes to be the whole earth so far as capable of culture. The king is God himself.——The general sense given in the received English version is not bad, viz.: that the soil is the ultimate source of supply for all human wants; even the king is dependent on the field, or the king is a servant to the field, *i. e.*, is compelled to do service to the soil in order to get subsistence for himself and his people.——The Septuagint suggests another construction in some respects more close to the original, viz.: The excellence of a country universally is this:—a king over well cultivated fields. That is, the best thing of all for the earth [in this line] is a king who fosters agriculture.——It was specially pertinent that Solomon should thus commend agriculture inasmuch as the exports of his country were almost exclusively these products of the soil. (See 1 Kings 5: 9, 11.) Solomon gave Hiram (of Tyre) twenty thousand "measures of wheat," etc. In the full account which Ezekiel (chap. 27) gives of the trade of Tyre, the same fact appears; "Judah and the land of Israel were thy merchants; they traded in thy market, wheat," etc. Such praise of agriculture was specially in point considered as addressed to the princes and monarchs of foreign lands—those princes being under temptation to oppress their subjects to such an extent as to impede the cultivation of the soil;—the merchants being moreover liable to over-estimate silver and gold and to under-estimate the more homely products of field culture. The indirect moral influence of husbandry is admirable, and Solomon was the very man to see it.

10. He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this *is* also vanity.

Avarice is wont often, not always, to take on this precise form—"the love of silver"—and to develop itself in hoarding the precious metals. A man of such spirit is never satisfied; there is nothing in silver and gold that can satisfy him. His miserly heart

is only tormented with the lust of accumulation and the fear of loss. Unceasing anxieties corrode his soul and forbid repose. This is precisely a "*vanity*." What can be more empty! Worse than merely empty, it is positively a mischief and a misery.

11. When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good *is there* to the owners thereof, saving the beholding *of them* with their eyes?

With the increase of wealth in goods, cattle, lands, there comes a demand for an increase of servants and employees to manage them. All these must be fed. Thus the outgoes advance with the incomes. What good then has the owner above his servants, except in this, that he can look on these possessions and say—All these are mine! Each alike has his daily bread; the owner no more; and his family, his household and servants no less. Hence the actual enjoyments of life are more nearly equal than is commonly supposed: the special advantage of the rich man above the poor is less than he is wont to think. These facts have a wholesome bearing upon the class for whom Solomon is specially writing. ——Luther comments tersely: "Whoso then gathers riches, gathers devourers. Therefore why plague thyself to collect much and to increase thy treasure? However many possessions thou hast, thou canst not do more than fill thy belly and clothe thy poor body. If God gives thee riches, use thy share as thou usest thy share of water, and *let the rest flow on*: and if thou doest it not, thy gathering will still be in vain."

12. The sleep of a laboring man *is* sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.

Comparing the man of daily labor with the man of wealth, the former is pretty sure to eat as well and to sleep much better. Such labor almost insures health, and with health the best pleasures of food and sleep. On the other hand, abundance—an excess above his real wants—is so much to be cared for and kept, often with a degree of anxiety that forbids sleep. In this balancing of the relative enjoyments of the two classes, the laborer has altogether the advantage.——This also is wholesome doctrine for the wealthy classes to whom Solomon specially addresses his book.

13. There is a sore evil *which* I have seen under the sun, *namely*, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt.

A sore evil it is that riches, the avails of so much labor, should be hoarded by their owner to his damage; kept, locked from use, to be only a curse to their possessor. What a man has paid for so dearly, one would think ought to pay him well in return. What then if it only pays him in *hurt*—rewards him with calami-

ties and curses!——The true wisdom of life lies in laboring not for one's self, but for others—for the greatest good of the greatest possible number. Riches accumulated and used on this principle are choice and precious blessings, not only to the great number of others blessed thereby, but specially to the princely owner—the almoner of these blessings to his fellow-creatures. What a luxury must life be to him! How unlike to his expanded and overflowing heart is the shriveled soul of the miserly man who hoards and keeps to his hurt, so that the more he has, he is only the more wretched!

14. But those riches perish by evil travail: and he begetteth a son, and *there is* nothing in his hand.

Here another point is made; those hoarded riches not only curse their owner while they stay, but they are liable to disappear suddenly and be no more. "They perish by evil travail"—"by luckless undertakings" (Stuart); by misfortune; by unforeseen disaster; by causes of loss which no human sagacity can provide against. "Riches take to themselves wings and fly away."——Then the man who is supposed to have been accumulating for his children, begets a son and has not a thing in his hand to give him. This is a sore trial to one who has labored hard for wealth to give his children, and has once had it, but has lost it.——Thus I prefer to answer the question, *Whose* hand? by saying—the father's. For it would be a too obvious truism to say that this rich man begat a son and this son was born with nothing in his hand. This happens to be true of all babes—those of the poor and of the rich alike.

15. As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labor, which he may carry away in his hand.

16. And this also *is* a sore evil, *that* in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath labored for the wind?

This too is said of the rich man. He leaves the world as naked as he entered it, and takes with him no fruit of all his life-long labors. In all points as he came, so does he go: what profit then is it to him that he hath labored for the wind? As if one were to accumulate some choice materials which a sudden blast of wind should sweep utterly away.——The apostle Paul (to Timothy 1 Eps. 6: 7) has the same idea, perhaps suggested by this passage; "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out." "What ceases with death can not make us truly happy even while we have it." It holds too low a sphere; touches not the greater elements of our being—character, virtue, goodness—the qualities that go with us into the eternal world. It is utterly unlike laying up treasures for heaven.

17. All his days also he eateth in darkness, and *he hath* much sorrow and wrath with his sickness.

This verse has been translated and construed variously, yet in general with substantially the same resulting sense. Stuart—"Also he consumes all his days in gloom, and is much irritated, and his infirmities are matter of indignation."——Hengstenberg—"All his days also he eateth in darkness and hath much discontent, and then his sickness and wrath." The word rendered in the English version "sorrow" is pointed in Hebrew as a verb. The general sentiment is that this rich man does not even enjoy his food, but all his life eats in darkness, *i. e.*, in sadness, anxiety; is full of discontent; his infirmities irritate his temper and make him intensely unhappy. Probably the writer alludes to those diseases which naturally result from luxurious living, and which so often help to poison the cup of the rich.——Thus closes one of the most vivid and truthful descriptions ever drawn by human pen of the wretchedness and folly of the avaricious pursuit of wealth. O how well if it might dissuade men from a life so full of disquiet, so disastrous in its influence upon the heart, and so sure to repay hard toil and corroding anxiety with the keenest disappointment!

18. Behold *that* which I have seen: *it is* good and comely *for one* to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it *is* his portion.

Look at the conclusions to which I have come from my personal observation of human life. It is both good in itself and comely, in the sense of appropriate, befitting man in all his relations, whether to God or to his fellow-men, that he should eat and drink what is needful and wholesome, and should enjoy the good of his labor as he passes on through life, accepting it all with grateful heart to his Great Benefactor and Preserver. The beauty of the passage lies in its recognition of God's hand in both the gift of days to live in, and the gift of food and drink to enjoy while he lives. It is preëminently wholesome in its moral bearings to keep this sense of God's favor in the gift of days and of daily food, evermore fresh upon the heart. It begets a humble trust for the future; allays all wasting anxieties for great accumulations; and inspires us to a ready sympathy and benevolence toward our fellows who may have fallen under sore affliction from the hand of the Lord. This is using the world as not abusing it; using it so as to fill it with heavenly influence toward a filial trust and a grateful love of our divine Father.——As indicated in the English margin, the Hebrew translated—"It is good and comely," might be rendered, "that is good which is also comely;" but the meaning seems to be—good and comely also.

19. Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labor; this *is* the gift of God.

To complete the sentence and bring out the full sense we may read—"The same is true of every man also to whom God hath given," etc. That is, it is true of every such man that it is both good and comely for him to eat and drink, accepting all as the gift of God. This verse adds to the thought in v. 18, this consideration—that if God gives to a man both riches and the ability to enjoy them, he should accept both these gifts, and especially the latter—the power to enjoy worldly good—as the very gift of God. It so often happens that where God gives riches, he gives not the power to enjoy them, that the bestowment of both blessings upon the same man should awaken special gratitude. The author proceeds to speak of this case in the next chapter, vs. 1, 2.——The sentiment of this verse appears also chap. 2: 24 and 3: 12, 13, 22.

20. For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth *him* in the joy of his heart.

He will have small occasion to dwell in mournful reminiscence upon the scenes of the past, however trying and laborious they may have been, for God now meets the desires of the heart, giving him both a competence of earthly good, and the ability to enjoy it.——Some critics give a slightly different turn to the word "answereth" by taking it in the causative sense of *making other things* (*e. g.*, all nature) answer (correspond) to the joy of his heart. God helps a man to a cheerful satisfied spirit which sheds sunshine over all this otherwise dark world, making every object reflect the same brightness which glows in his own trustful, happy soul. The very idea is beautiful, and the state of mind which it describes is almost half a heaven upon earth, so that it were a pity to throw any doubt upon this construction. The verb will bear it since it may be in the causative (Hiphil) conjugation; but the "*all things*," assumed to be the direct object of the causative verb is not in the text. Hence the first construction above given corresponds best with what the writer actually said.

## CHAPTER VI.

The course of thought in this chapter is very similar to that in chap. 5: 10–17, viz., a specification of ways in which men who seek much worldly good are frustrated in their search and find little or none.

1. There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it *is* common among men:

2. A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honor, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this *is* vanity, and it *is* an evil disease.

This evil, I understand the author to say, *presses heavily upon man;* not, is "common among men." This sense is rendered very probable by the usage of the same word in chap. 2: 21 and 8: 6; "a *great* evil;" "the misery of man is *great* upon him."——The case is that of a man to whom God has given all the wealth and all the distinction by means of wealth that his soul could desire, but has not "given him the power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it." The author does not state definitely *why* this rich man could not enjoy his wealth. Probably eating is to be taken in the broad sense for all forms of enjoying wealth, and the statement is made thus indefinite on purpose to cover a great variety of cases; *e. g.*, ill-health; indigestion which would quite forbid his enjoyment of his food; or robbery and violence by which it might suddenly pass into other and villainous hands.——"This is a vanity and *a grievous plague.*" In Deut. 25: 29, "sore sickness," translating the same words that are used here, has the same general sense as "plagues" in the parallel clause, which the Lord would make "wonderful." Solomon's meaning is not to be restricted to bodily disease.

3. If a man beget a hundred *children*, and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also *that* he have no burial; I say, *that* an untimely birth *is* better than he.

4. For he cometh in with vanity, and departeth in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness.

5. Moreover he hath not seen the sun, nor known *any thing:* this hath more rest than the other.

Long life and a numerous offspring were accounted by the Orientals the richest of blessings. But Solomon says that even this man so blessed, if his desires are not gratified, and if moreover he should fail of burial (in their esteem a very great calamity),

has a less desirable lot than the "untimely birth"—the still-born who live not to see the light of day. This "untimely birth" is further described in vs. 4, 5. The point decisive in favor of the latter is that he hath *more rest* than the other who has lived long and had many children. *Rest* is regarded in Oriental life as the chief good.

6. Yea, though he live a thousand years twice *told*, yet hath he seen no good: do not all go to one place?

The same comparison is still continued, enlarging the supposition as to the great age, the "many days," which the father of a hundred children should live. Suppose his days double the years of the longest-lived antediluvian, yet if he fails of seeing good in his life, what avails it that he has lived so long? Does not he die at last and go to the same place with the still-born infant? A life however long, yet fruitless of enjoyment, and ending in a death that is common to all the race and even to the untimely birth—what is the good of it?

7. All the labor of man *is* for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled.

8. For what hath the wise more than the fool? what hath the poor, that knoweth to walk before the living?

The demand for food is twofold, viz.: (1.) For sustenance, strength and life; and (2.) For the indulgence and gratification of appetite. Comprising both these demands, it may be said truly that much if not strictly *all* of human labor is "for the mouth." But the appetite is not so filled that its cravings do not return. More supplies are soon wanted. And in this respect the wise man and the fool are alike—the wise having no distinctive advantage over the fool. The poor man who has great discretion as to his demeanor before living men is here parallel to the wise man, and the same things are said of him. He feels the returning demands of appetite in common with the man of no such discretion. The question—What hath the wise man more than the fool? must be restricted to the definite point in hand, and not taken in a broad, unqualified sense.

9. Better *is* the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire: this *is* also vanity and vexation of spirit.

The sentiment is—It is better to enjoy the sight of present good quietly and gratefully than to let your desires roam abroad for pleasures far to seek and hard to gain. Accept what comes to your hand, and beware that you do not throw a loose rein on your desires for absent good. Luther remarks:—Solomon's will is that we make use of the present; thank God for it; and not think of any thing else, like the dog in Æsop who snapped at the shadow and let the flesh fall."

10. That which hath been is named already, and it is known that it *is* man: neither may he contend with him that is mightier than he.

The received translation fails to give the full sense of this verse. I paraphrase it: What man has been and is, was long ago (*i. e.*, in Eden) indicated by the name given him there—"Adam" *i. e.*, *dust;* and it is known [by long and sad experience] that he is only dust—frail and perishing; and therefore entirely unable to contend with him who is mightier far, *viz.*, the Most High God. How can frail dust cope with Omnipotence?——Beyond all question the passage alludes to the name, Adam, given to man in Eden (Gen. 2 : 7) because he was formed out of "*Adamah*," the ground or dust of the earth.

11. Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what *is* man the better?

To the word rendered "things," Prof. Stuart gives the sense *words* (the Hebrew will bear either), and he supposes the meaning to be that words are vain when used in the effort to "disclose a permanent and immutable good for man in the present world." I prefer the sense *things*, thus:—"For there are many things that intensify vanity"—augmenting its force and insuring its result of utter emptiness; what profit then can there be for man in the selfish pursuit of earthly good?

12. For who knoweth what *is* good for man in *this* life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?

Who can know what of all merely earthly things will be an enduring good to man in this vain and fleeting life? For who can tell a man what shall be *after him*—*i. e.*, either after his present hour, in the remaining future of his present life; or after his death, befalling his estate and his labors then? The general scope of thought favors the former view: the usual sense of the phrase, "after him," favors the latter. In either sense there is truth and a pertinent application. All the future from any given point is utterly unknown to man; how then can he tell what is good for him in this life while yet his fleeting days hold out?—— So entire is this uncertainty, so dark is all the future,—why should man vainly labor to carve out his own fortune by dint of care and toil, and refuse to cast himself upon God, commit his ways to his guiding providence, and trust him for all?

## CHAPTER VII.

In this chapter we have miscellaneous counsels, bearing upon the culture of wisdom and virtue.

1. A good name *is* better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth.

The Hebrew which means strictly a *name* is pertinently qualified in the received version by the word "good"—"a *good* name," as in Prov. 22: 1, "A name (*i. e.*, a good name) is rather to be chosen than great riches." It is of course assumed that this reputation is well deserved, being founded in true virtue. Such a name is more fragrant than the sweet odors of the choicest ointments. This figure was familiar to the people of the East who made great use of ointments and valued them highly. The comparison is at once pertinent and beautiful. We love to think of a truly good man. The mention of his name and even the very thought of him refresh the soul and strengthen every virtuous purpose and effort. They have the power of a charm against temptations to vice. The savor of such goodness in this evil world is like some fragrance borne down to us from the fields of paradise. It comforts us to see that fallen human nature can be so redeemed. We have more exalted ideas of the practical possibilities of virtue in our race.——The declaration that the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth seems by its connection here to be made concerning the *good man* specially—the man who both has and deserves to have a good name. As to him it is true; for birth opens to him the era of conflict, trial, temptation, contingency; but death closes the scene with victory;—all perils over, all conflicts past, and the great problem of life wrought out with glorious success. These views are surely not too high for the age of Solomon, nor for his personal wisdom; for they appear in the utterances of some of the sages of heathen antiquity. "Judge of my principles and of my life," said one of them, "when you have seen me die."

2. *It is* better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that *is* the end of all men; and the living will lay *it* to his heart.

3. Sorrow *is* better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.

4. The heart of the wise *is* in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

Since every man must die and knows he must, it is good for him to reflect upon this fact. The scenes of the house of mourning lead the mind to such reflections. It is wholesome for every living man to cherish them in his heart. Sorrow may make the

countenance sad, but it makes the heart better. Sympathy with those who are suffering griefs known to be the common lot of mankind serves to soften hearts otherwise hard, and to bind more closely together those whom the selfish collisions of life are wont to sever and keep asunder. Moreover, the grave gives us our best lessons on the value of time, the duties of life, and the momentuous issues of eternity. Hence it is that wise men feel at home in the house of mourning even as fools do in the house of mirth. The wise find a congenial atmosphere in the one; fools in the other. Hence whoever aspires to wisdom should put himself at school with the wise, where they love to be. If he would shun frivolity, let him turn his steps far away from the house of mirth. ——Some of the critics think it essential to the explanation of these verses to assume that the external circumstances of the writer were depressing and afflictive, and that for this reason he took this morbidly sombre view of life, feeling that death was better than such a suffering existence. But it seems to me that just views of life as a scene of moral conflict will adequately account for these words. With such views men readily feel the immense value of those considerations which are naturally suggested by scenes of mourning and death. Whoever is manfully struggling upward in virtue and girding his soul against temptation's power will surely find the better elements of his moral nature quickened in the presence of death and the grave. He will be conscious of something there congenial to virtue. Hence we may ascribe these remarks to Solomon's profound wisdom rather than to any specially afflictive circumstances, or to a positive weariness of life.

5. *It is* better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools.

6. For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so *is* the laughter of the fool: this also *is* vanity.

Quite in harmony (morally) with the superior value of mourning to mirth, is this next thought. Listen to rebuke from wise men rather than to flattery from fools. It will do you more good. You are not yet perfect, and the discreet rebuke of the wise may help you upward. The praise of fools might inflate your vanity; and even if their wit should seem to sparkle, and its light should flare up brilliantly, the wise Solomon will abate your high appreciation of it by reminding you that the crackling of thorns under a pot is of the same sort, equally flashy and equally transient, vapid and delusive. There are few men more dangerous in society than those whose wit and laughter foster giddy mirth and repel all serious thought. Solomon had seen such men and had marked their influence adverse to true wisdom.——It is not perhaps absolutely certain that "the song of fools," as spoken of here, involves flattery and praise, a "plaudit song," as Prof. Stuart calls it; but the antithesis with the rebuke of the wise suggests this and renders it probable. On the other hand, laughter and the crackling of

thorns under a pot carry the mind to the usual manifestations of giddy mirth.——The figure of thorns, burning under a pot, is quite oriental—the scarcity of fuel there and the abundance of thorn-bushes rendering this a very familiar scene.

7. Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad; and a gift destroyeth the heart.

The main question of interpretation here is whether the wise man made mad by oppression is the oppressor or the oppressed—the master or the slave. It is somewhat common to assume the latter, in the sense that being oppressed drives men to rash and unwise resistance. But without doubt Solomon speaks here of the *oppressor* and not of the *oppressed*. For the word he uses, rendered "maketh mad," does not mean to make impatient, furious, revengeful, but, to make infatuated, to cause to play the fool. And this expresses most appositely the reflex influence of being an oppressor. No better illustration of it ever need be sought in history than the American people have seen in the slaveholders of our country. Were ever a class of men more thoroughly infatuated than they? Have men ever made more egregious blunders in their policy for upholding their cherished system of human bondage? Verily, so far as concerns the influence upon wisdom in the sense of sagacity, the slaveholder as compared with the slave has incomparably the worst of it, and as to the influence upon general character, morals, and virtue, the same must be said. The party that are made fools by oppression are not the oppressed but are the oppressors.—— Yet again, the parallelism in the verse sustains the same construction. The gift or bribe that corrupts the heart contemplates the case of the ruler or judge—the same who is supposed to be guilty of oppressing. It perverts a man's heart to receive a bribe, just as it does to lend himself to oppressing his fellow men for his own selfish ends. Prof. Stuart supposes the wise man thought of here to be precisely the "Hakim"—the Arabic name for the judge and the Hebrew word used here. He thinks that this case comes in here as a tacit exception to what he had said (v. 5) of the value of rebukes from wise men. As much as to say—While the judicious rebukes of the wise are useful, yet, when the wise man gives way to the temptation to oppress his fellow men, it makes him a fool. If he touch a bribe, his wise heart is at once corrupted, destroyed. Alas, this is but too true!

8. Better *is* the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: *and* the patient in spirit *is* better than the proud in spirit.

The first clause of this verse, standing apart from any connection, might apply to many things; but standing here with the case of the oppressor before it, and the comparison between the patient and the proud of spirit after it, and indeed in some sense parallel in sentiment, we must construe it as having reference to the case of the oppressor and the oppressed. In this connection the author

seems to mean this: If you would form your opinion of the effects of oppression upon the parties involved, judge not from the beginning of the thing, but from the end thereof. Wait patiently and see how they come out at last. Mark and see if it fares well with the oppressor in the latter end. Note how it debases his better feelings, fosters his basest passions, perverts his judgment, and makes him play the fool, and thus precipitate upon himself the judgments of Almighty God for the sin of oppression. The latter end of the case will give you a far better insight than the beginning of it, into the terrible curses which a career of oppression is sure to bring upon its author.——Here also American slavery is a wonderful chapter of illustrative examples. During several generations at the beginning it seemed that oppression was strangely successful—pouring wealth, luxury, social prestige, and political power into the lap of the oppressor;—but what of the latter end thereof? What now of the wealth and the political power of which slavery vaunted itself so long?——In the last clause we might suppose the writer would set the impatient and irascible, by name, over against the patient; but instead of this, with the far-seeing eye of a wise man, he puts his finger not on the effect but on the cause. He knows very well that under oppression it is the proud in spirit who become impatient and will not brook abuse. So he says it is better to be patient under inflicted wrongs than to be too proud to bear them meekly. He assumes that the proud in spirit will fire up in resistance and revenge; but as against civil authority it is plain he does not recommend such resistance. It is better to bide God's time for setting right these grievous wrongs of a wicked world.

9. Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.

This reason assigned against indulging hasty anger is very striking, viz.: that such anger finds its native home, its resting and abiding place, in the bosom of fools. It is not the dictate of prudence and wisdom, but of thoughtlessness and of unwisdom. Therefore, as you would be wise and would have the good of your wisdom, guard against sudden outbursts of anger. Under its impulses you will be very sure to do what you will have occasion to regret most bitterly.

10. Say not thou, What is *the cause* that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this.

The word "wisely" ("inquire wisely") does not qualify the *manner* of pressing this inquiry, but the origin or occasion of making it. As the marginal reading suggests, the original might be rendered, "not *out of* wisdom," *i. e.*, not *from* or because of wisdom dost thou raise this inquiry. His meaning is that the underlying assumption that the present age has degenerated below the stand-

ard of past ages, implies a distorted vision—an over-estimate of present evils and an under-estimate of present good. He would suggest to us that former ages had their evil as well as their good points, and that to compare the past with the present wisely will require a cool judgment and a clear-sighted eye. The mistake to which he refers here comes very often from the heavy pressure of some present evil. Sometimes the aged make it because the former was the time of their activities; the present of their repose; and they are prone to feel that things were better done in those times when their hand was prominent than now when they are only lookers-on. Solomon does not give such a judgment of things the credit of wisdom.——On the other hand national degeneracy may sometimes be a real fact, and in such a case good men ought to see it, study its causes, and labor to withstand their influence. It is certainly supposable that there was more real degeneracy in the latter part of Solomon's reign than he was himself fully aware of, and hence more ground for this inquiry into its causes than he seems to recognize.

11. Wisdom *is* good with an inheritance: and *by it there is* profit to them that see the sun.

The author does not mean that wisdom is good provided you have wealth with it, for this would imply that it is not good without wealth—a sentiment which he distinctly discards. (See chap. 4: 13 and 9: 15–17.) But he means that wisdom is good *along with* and *equally with* an inheritance—should be accounted a positive good as truly as wealth and of as high an order. Indeed the last clause affirms that wisdom is even *better* than wealth, and affirms this universally as to all the living, who are described here as those that see the sun.

12. For wisdom *is* a defense, *and* money *is* a defense: but the excellency of knowledge *is, that* wisdom giveth life to them that have it.

The Hebrew of the first clause is very peculiar, running thus: "For in the shadow of wisdom, in the shadow of money," implying that both forms of expression are used and are true; that both wisdom and wealth afford men their shadow for protection from the heats and evils of life. In the climate of Palestine a shadow becomes a pertinent figure for protection, and the more so because the great evils sent on men are so often presented under the figure of heat and fire.——"Giveth life" can not be here in the sense of imparting it by creation or by resurrection; but either in the sense of giving real life—the truest and best happiness, or in the sense of preserving life in seasons of peril. The words will bear either sense, and both are true.

13. Consider the work of God: for who can make *that* straight, which he hath made crooked?

Here is scope for wisdom—not to fathom the work of God; much less to counteract, resist, or change it; but to see clearly that no such thing is possible to mortals. (See chap. 1: 15 and notes there.) I understand this work of God to be his ways in providence, with special reference to those arrangements which may seem to us to be out of joint, distorted, because they spare the wicked and afflict the righteous; and possibly referring also to those disruptions in the physical order of the world which bring calamities in their train; *e. g.*, tempests, earthquakes, plagues, etc. These things men are prone to account "crooked;" but if so, who can make them straight? It is most wise for man to recognize God's hand in these things and bow submissively to his known wisdom, however inscrutable it may be to our present vision. Let it be forever settled in our mind that the Great God evermore doeth all things well. Hengstenberg has well said: "Because no one *can* withstand God, no one therefore should *wish* to. We ought to humble ourselves *with joy* beneath the almighty hand of God. For, as the Almighty One, he is the sum and substance of all wisdom, all love, all righteousness. Almighty arbitrariness is inconceivable."——Perhaps it were better to say, *insupposable, i. e.*, utterly at variance with every just notion of wisdom and of love.

14. In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.

The "work of God," just alluded to, fills human life with various and even contrasted scenes of prosperity and adversity. Hence adjust thyself to them as they occur. In the day of prosperity rejoice, thankful for the good which the Lord bestows in his loving kindness. In the day of adversity, give thyself much to thoughtful reflection, if so be thou mayest discover in thy heart or life the occasion of the Lord's chastisements. Moreover, God hath set prosperity so over against adversity, arranging them in such uncertain succession that no man can surely anticipate what is next. Let every man, therefore, be prepared for either. With a filial, obedient trust in God, he need not fear, for the worst that can come will only bring him nearer to God and be therefore a blessing; but in the attitude of rebellion against God and in the selfish struggle after good that is only of this world, man is prepared for neither. Whichever may come, it will prove only a curse to his soul.——The dark uncertainty expressed in the last clause—No man can know whether good or ill is coming upon him hereafter—was designed to bear specially upon the pleasure-loving and seeking class who make earthly good their great end of life. In such a world, so governed of God, how surely they must miss the end they seek and at last bewail their failure and their folly!

15. All *things* have I seen in the days of my vanity:

there is a just *man* that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked *man* that prolongeth *his life* in his wickedness:

The doctrine of this verse is that moral retribution is not perfect in this life; that length of days, and by implication other forms of good and ill as well, do not befall men precisely according to their moral character. I have looked through this whole matter, says Solomon; I have seen it in all its phases during my vain, fleeting life. I have seen the righteous perish (by persecution perhaps) in his righteousness and even because of it: and I have seen wicked men prolong their days both in their sins and despite of them. It can not therefore be claimed that God's moral administration is finished and perfect in the present life. These anomalous cases do certainly occur; I have seen them all.——In the first clause the Hebrew requires, not "all things," but *all this*; literally, "*the all* have I seen," etc., *i. e.*, all these varieties and anomalies in the allotment of human destiny on earth.

16. Be not righteous over much, neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself?

It is not supposable that this can be a caution against too much genuine righteousness or too much true wisdom; *i. e.*, you can not suppose it unless you assume that the author is very shaky in his own moral principles. It is not charitable to assume this unless there be an imperative demand for it. The better construction therefore is—Be not self-righteous, be not vain of your righteousness; do not make it obtrusive and repulsive.——Probably this verse must be assumed to have so much connection with the preceding one as to contemplate a period of persecution for righteousness' sake. In this view his meaning might be: Do not obtrude your righteousness offensively upon the enemies of God and of all righteousness; do not make a useless display of it to provoke persecution.——In the clause which speaks of wisdom, the form of the Hebrew verb very often means, to make a vain show, a foolish display. Such a course under the circumstances contemplated would precipitate persecution and the unwise man might become the occasion of his own destruction. The fact that the verb rendered "over wise" naturally has this sense of vain display favors the same construction of what is said of being righteous. But the passage has real difficulties. It is not easy to account for a state of persecution for righteousness' sake, such as v. 15 seems to assume.

17. Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time?

Neither do thou rush into the opposite extreme as a means of greater safety. Fools have their own ways to perish: why shouldest thou hasten the time of thine own death by thine own

folly?——Although it be true as is implied in v. 15, that the wicked man sometimes prolongs life in spite of his wickedness, yet take care not to abuse this fact by overdoing your wickedness. Such folly will insure and precipitate your ruin. More especially under the ancient economy—generally, in every age, the outrageously wicked do not live out half their days.

18. *It is* good that thou shouldest take hold of this; yea, also from this withdraw not thine hand: for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all.

The cautions given in vs. 16 and 17 are here reaffirmed for the sake of deeper impression. It is good that thou take firm hold of what I have said about being righteous and wise; also that thou draw not back thy hand from my caution against extreme, outrageous wickedness and folly. He that feareth God will come forth safe from all these perils, and (by implication) will avoid the mistakes (or sins) which I exhort thee not to commit. This last clause, implying that if a man really fears God he will not be righteous over much nor wicked over much and will consequently escape the ruin which follows either, shows plainly that in the author's view, the sense and spirit of his precepts are in harmony with sound morals and true piety.——Some have supposed that these cautions against over much righteousness and wickedness were *bona fide* instructions for magistrates—on the one hand against being too exacting and rigorous; and on the other, against being too lax, corrupt and foolish—to which construction I have two objections: (1.) That there is nothing in the passage or its context to suggest, much less to restrict, its special application to magistrates; and (2.) In this application its tone of morality would be repulsively low. Law and right would cease to be the magistrate's rule and guide. He would be required to consult his personal welfare only.

19. Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty *men* which are in the city.

Wisdom affords protection to the wise man. The "mighty men" here are probably captains, chieftains, and perhaps the implication is, at the head of their commands.——"Ten," for an indefinite but very considerable number, supposed to be the garrison of a city. The same sentiment appears in Prov. 21: 22 and 24: 5, 6 and also in Eccl. 9: 16, 18.

20. For *there is* not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.

The word rendered "sinneth" means primarily, to miss the mark, to mistake, to err: and secondarily, to sin. Here, standing in contrast with "doing good," it should naturally take the sense of sinning.——The connection of thought is difficult and has been

understood variously. If the first word means "for,"* it naturally connects this verse with the preceding, and then might imply that the best of wise men sometimes need their wisdom for protection, since they are not always sinlessly wise, but sometimes make mistakes or commit sins which involve them in difficulty.——On the other hand if this first word, rendered "for," means here *surely*, as it possibly may at the beginning of a sentence, then a new subject may be introduced, thus: Surely the best of men sometimes sin; therefore be not over anxious to hear all that may be said of thyself; thy mistakes and faults will sometimes provoke severe remarks from even thy servants which it were quite as pleasant for thee not to hear.——This construction seems to be admissible. The pertinent sense which it brings out is its chief recommendation. The common usage of the word "for" favors the former.

21. Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee:

22. For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others.

Let the consciousness that thou thyself hast sometimes spoken too severely of others admonish thee to expect the same of other men and even of servants toward thyself, and let it make thee content not to inquire very carefully into all they may say.—— May we not suppose that in the latter years of Solomon's life, there were whisperings of dissatisfaction with his course, which sometimes came to his ears, and which may have suggested this counsel? The same remark might apply to v. 10 above.——As suggested in the general introduction, the reader will note here that the parties specially addressed are not the common people, not the toiling millions; but men high in rank or in wealth, for they have "servants."

23. All this have I proved by wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it *was* far from me.

24. That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out?

"Proved" in the sense of assayed, tried as metals are tested in the crucible. Despite of my best efforts to gain absolute wisdom, I found it still far from me.——Another turn is given by some to the first clause of v. 24, thus: "Far off is that which *is*," *i. e.*, the real entity of things, their essential nature; and deep, deep is it; who can find it out?" The order of the words in the Hebrew somewhat favors this construction; but its abstruseness makes it very doubtful.——The usage of representing things difficult of comprehension as being *far off*, deep or high beyond our reach, appears in Deut. 30: 11–14 and Rom. 10: 6–8—said there

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negatively of the precepts of God's law and gospel. These are declared to be "not hidden from thee"—not "far off"—not "in heaven that thou shouldst say, Who shall go up into heaven to bring them down," etc.

25. I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason *of things*, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness *and* madness:

A more close rendering will give the nicer shades of the original, thus: "I turned myself round and round, even my heart did, to know and to search and to seek out wisdom and intelligence, and to know wickedness as folly, and this folly as madness"—*i. e.*, to know wickedness in its true character as folly, and this folly to be real madness.

26. And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart *is* snares and nets, *and* her hands *as* bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her.

This testimony as to the vile woman who sets herself to seduce the other sex to their ruin is expanded yet more fully in Prov. 5. She is there called "the strange woman," *i. e.*, a foreigner, from other lands—which indicates the depth of licentiousness and pollution to which the heathen of adjacent countries in that age had sunk. Jewish history abounds with facts to the same purport. It is deplorable that Solomon should have had so much personal experience of the depravity of the "outlandish women" of his time. (See Neh. 13: 26.)

27. Behold, this have I found, saith the Preacher, *counting* one by one, to find out the account;

The Hebrew phrase translated in the English version, "counting one by one," may mean either, taking up one thing at a time for special investigation, or applying one thing to another by comparison. Literally it is—"one to one to find out deep knowledge." It defines the method of his investigation.

28. Which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not: one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found.

In a thousand he has found one good and true man, but not one good and true woman. Alas! that he should have thrown himself into the society of *such* women—"strange women!" Alas! that he should have put himself into such relations to seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines! (1 K. 11: 3.) How could he hope to find one good and true woman even in all this host while he held them in such relations to himself! Not one of them all had any right to feel that she enjoyed his love,

confidence, and fidelity as a true husband. This testimony of Solomon, therefore, so far from bearing to the dishonor of the sex as such, bears only to the condemnation of polygamy and to the exposure of the wretchedly low morals of the outlying countries, long polluted by the basest forms of idol worship and by their attendant abominations.

29. Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.

"Inventions," not in the arts—the handicrafts of life, but in the science of sinning, in devices for the perpetration of iniquity. God made man upright; but man, falling from his primeval purity, had strangely prostituted his powers to sinning, to devising methods of selfish gratification, schemes of fraud, treachery, pollution, the covering up of iniquity; the means of being in fact intensely wicked, and yet of retaining the semblance of virtue. Ah, how does it tax the ingenuity of wicked men to sustain an appearance of virtue so unlike the foul reality of their vices!

## CHAPTER VIII.

Wisdom is commended (v. 1), and loyal obedience to kings (vs. 2–5). The unknown future of God's providence may frustrate the schemes of man (vs. 6, 7), and so may man's mortality (v. 8). The career and doom of wicked rulers appears (vs. 9, 10), whom the delay of divine retribution encourages onward in their sin (v. 11). The imperfections in present retribution should not shake our faith in God nor in the final triumph of the right (vs. 12, 13), though these imperfections are often exceedingly trying and perplexing (v. 14). It is well to enjoy the daily comforts of life which God assigns us and provides for us in the journey of life (v. 15) since no reach of human thought can fathom the depths of God's ways in providence (vs. 16, 17).

1. Who *is* as the wise *man?* and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? a man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed.

Who can compare with the wise man? Who else knows the exposition of things, *i. e.*, knows how to explain the occult causes of events?—said perhaps with an eye to accounting for the permission of evil under the government of God (chap. 7: 29); also, for the present apparent imperfections in God's moral government and in the retributions due for sin.——Wisdom is apparent even in a man's face to whom God has given the power of expressing intel-

ligence and emotion. It makes his face glow with the radiance of thought.——The last clause is usually construed to mean, the brazen impudence of folly gives place to the mild and modest expression of good sense. The original word means primarily strength, fixedness, and may perhaps mean here that the stolid, inexpressive face becomes through wisdom full of intellectual and benevolent expression; a fact often noticeable, and certainly worthy of remark by such a writer in such a connection.

2. I *counsel thee* to keep the king's commandment, and *that* in regard of the oath of God.

The original is quite abrupt, having no verb at all for "counsel." "I—mark the mouth of the king;" *i. e.*, so say I. And do this, not merely through fear of his displeasure, but because of the oath of God which binds thee to loyal obedience to thy king.

3. Be not hasty to go out of his sight: stand not in an evil thing; for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him.

4. Where the word of a king *is, there is* power: and who may say unto him, What doest thou?

If he should displease you, go not forth from his presence in rash haste; beware that you make no expression of dislike, much less of strong passion and rage; and "persist not in any evil thing." If you are in the wrong, yield and be not obstinate; for he will do what he pleases. It behooves you to fear his absolute power, and to adjust yourself to it.——In the middle clause, Stuart prefers this sense, *viz.*, "Do not make delay in regard to a command which is grievous;" *i. e.*, obey promptly, even an unjust command.——I see no occasion to give the words this meaning, and the idea is very objectionable and should not be assumed without some valid reason.——Hengstenberg thinks "the king," in vs. 2–4, is God himself; but there is no indication of this; while if this king were God, we might expect to see some of the names of God applied to him. Besides, in the first verse of the passage both God and the king are introduced separately; you should obey your king because of your oath before God. Then again, if this king were God, how could the subject—man—be supposed to go forth from his presence, as said in v. 3? Well might he exclaim —"Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Whither shall I flee from thy presence? (Ps. 139: 7.)

5. Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing: and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment.

Obedience to the king will shield the subject from the evil consequences which surely follow disobedience. Wisdom will teach him what befits the times and circumstances, and what is therefore true "judgment."——Solomon's own relations as king afforded

him countless illustrations of these truths. Very probably he had sometimes put down with a strong hand the uprisings of disaffection. He knew that such a course was common in the absolute governments of the countries adjacent.

6. Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man *is* great upon him.

7. For he knoweth not that which shall be: for who can tell him when it shall be?

These verses have been construed variously by good critics. It is difficult to determine satisfactorily their precise significance. The choice seems to me to lie between these two constructions: (1.) In close connection with the preceding context, he says (v. 5) —A wise man's heart discerns the fit time and way of doing things: (v. 6) and because success depends so much on this wisdom as to judging of times and seasons (and because so few have and use it), therefore the misery of the race bears heavily upon them. (V. 7) For man can know the future but very imperfectly; for who can tell him *when* events shall occur?——In this construction the connection with the preceding context is natural, but the connection of v. 7 with v. 6, though not bad, is yet not altogether faultless.——(2.) The second construction makes a very peculiar connection with v. 5. Passing over from man's "time and judgment" to God's "time and judgment," as developed in his providential ordering of events, it supposes that the writer means by "a time for every purpose" precisely what he meant in chap. 3: 1–10. Because God in his providence determines the time and manner of all events and shapes them so that human life is full of changes, reverses, contrasts, doings and undoings, which no man can forecast or avert, therefore the calamities of man are great on the earth; (v. 7) for man can not know *what* is yet to come nor *when*. The future is all to him unknown.——This construction has in its favor the fact that the same words for "time and purpose" are here as in chap. 3: 1; also that this line of thought makes a perfect connection between v. 6 and v. 7, and also connects naturally with v. 8. In view of these considerations, I can not well resist the conclusion that this is what the author means. As in chap. 3: 1–10 his inference from the views there taken of God's course in providence was—"What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboreth?" *i. e.*: How many failures continually occur in human plans because God's over-ruling plans set them aside and baffle man's vain purpose: How can man accumulate surely according to his own purposes while God's purposes comprise such incessant undoing of man's doings? So here: Because God gives such shape to every purpose, so often disappointing man; "therefore the misery of man is great upon him."——Of course this is looking upon the merely human side of things, leaving out of account for the time the great fact that God frustrates human plans for purposes both wise and good, *i. e.*, that he may put checks upon

the spirit of mere pleasure-seeking, and may turn man's heart from seeking earthly good to seeking heavenly—to make earthly loss conducive to heavenly gain.——Prof. Stuart gives a very different turn to v. 6. Because man's *sins* (not his misery) are great, therefore God has a final judgment for every human purpose and act.——But this accepts an unusual instead of the usual sense of the word rendered "misery:" makes a very bad connection with v. 7: and puts a very different sense upon the words, "time and judgment," from what they bear in v. 5. These circumstances conspire to set aside his construction.

8. *There is* no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and *there is* no discharge in *that* war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.

From the general truth that no man knows the future, the author passes to the specific one, that no man can resist death. It *will* come and fulfill the mission on which God has sent it. No man hath power to retain his spirit when God summons it away. He is utterly powerless in the battle with death; he can not be exempted or discharged in that war; no matter how wicked he may be, how desperate, how blasphemous, how malignant toward God,—this can not save him from his doom. The weakness and frailty of man before the stroke of death are analogous to his weakness in regard to knowledge of the future.——Prof. Stuart translates—"No man hath power over the wind to restrain the wind," etc.,—apparently overlooking the imperative demands of the context here, which certainly treats not of the wind, but of the immortal spirit of the dying man.

9. All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun: *there is* a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt.

"All this have I seen," introduces a slightly different subject—the case not of wicked men in general, but of wicked rulers.——In the last clause the question is to be settled—For *whose* hurt, that of the ruler or of the ruled? The Hebrew reads—"a time when man rules over man for hurt to him"—the nearest antecedent, and that therefore to which "him" should refer, being the man ruled over. The case is that of a king who rules to the damage or ruin of his subjects. The reflex ruin upon himself is secondary, and not specially referred to in this first statement.

10. And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: this *is* also vanity.

The English version—"who had come and gone from the place of the holy"—represents these wicked men as having frequented

"the place of the holy"—with probable reference to their worshiping assemblies. But the Hebrew accents, by making a long pause after "come," are against this construction, and the words themselves do not favor it, but rather suggest this as the sense: "And so I saw these wicked ones [rulers especially] buried, and they went down, *i. e.*, to their grave; yea, from the place of the holy [their tribunals of justice] they passed away [forever]; and they who had done so were forgotten in the city."——This is another point in the vanity of human life—the sad end and the fearful ruin of the dead sinner, king or magistrate though he may have been. For though gorgeously buried, yet the clearer vision of faith sees him go down to his dishonored grave, passing for evermore away from the society and communion of the holy, to be quickly forgotten in the city where he had guiltily oppressed the innocent.——It is noticeable that our Lord in like manner (Luke 16: 19–24) represents the rich man's burial as a notable event, yet his soul went down to hell, away forever from the abodes of the holy.——The verb rendered in our English version, "had come," is used naturally of the going down of the sun, and of going down into the grave.——Let it be considered moreover that Solomon does not speak of this frustration of human hopes as a vanity in the way of *complaining of it as wrong.* He simply adduces it as one illustration of the utter failure of the wicked man's life. Though high in dignity and power, yet ruling over other men to their hurt, he soon ran through his career; went down to his grave; ceased forever to be seen in the place of the holy; and was speedily forgotten. This is indeed a specimen of vanity, but so let it be!

11. Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

Hengstenberg thus translates: "Because a sentence is not pronounced, the work of wickedness hasteneth; therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." But the received English version gives the sense well. The delay in God's retributive judgments for sin emboldens sinners; they madly say—"Where is the promise of his coming?" and set their heart fully to the doing of evil. The very mercy that spares the sinner to give him space for repentance, he abuses and perverts to bolder sin, to deeper guilt, and to a swift and more terrible doom. Alas! for the infatuation of sinners! What can divine mercy do for them more with honor and safety when the merciful delay of deserved retribution results only in more desperate sinning! Scarcely any words in this book evince a more just appreciation of the spirit of wicked men than these. The author had noted closely but truthfully how wicked men abuse God's mercy and provoke his wrath.

12. Though a sinner do evil a hundred times, and his *days*

be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him:

13. But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong *his* days, *which are* as a shadow; because he feareth not before God.

The current teaching of the Old Testament is that the sinner shall not but the righteous shall prolong his days on the earth. No doubt this was usually the fact—that dispensation being conducted largely on the principle of a present retribution. Solomon here says that though there may be an apparent exception to this rule for a season, yet it must be short; soon the rule will prevail; the guilty sinner will perish in his sins because he does not fear God.——Remarkably in this description of the good man the point of his fearing God is repeated for the greater prominence and emphasis: "It shall be well with the *fearers* of God who truly *fear* before him."——"Days which are as the shadow," is the common Hebrew figure for a short, evanescent life. (See Psalms 144: 4 and 102: 11). "Man is like to vanity; his days are as a shadow that passeth away."

14. There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just *men,* unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked: again, there be wicked *men,* to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also *is* vanity.

One of the sore trials of this earthly state comes from what seems to be an imperfection in the divine administration of retributive justice. It seems to us that there are good men who receive the treatment due to the work of the wicked, and also bad men who have the reward due to the work of the righteous. So undeniably it does sometimes seem to mortals. God's moral government over men is not complete and finished in this world. Its retributions are allotted only in part here; the unfinished part lies over to the future world. Under the clearer revelations of the New Testament some points are explained which must have been very perplexing to such minds as Solomon's. In this later light we can see that God shapes this present world precisely for probation, and not for full retribution; that he presents himself before us in the very forms which most thoroughly test our faith, our docility, our obedience; which reveal enough for us to know to meet these most vital ends and reserve the rest for the fuller light of eternity. He gives us illustrations of his righteous justice, abundantly sufficient to satisfy the candid and honest mind, yet not so much as to leave no scope for the exercise of candor, honesty, and docility. When men intensely love darkness rather than light, they can and will have darkness and not light.——Another fact of vast importance to the explanation of these apparent anomalies in God's dealings with men, is that he continually blends together discipline

and partial retribution, sending afflictions upon men for both these purposes, and perhaps giving us no definite marks by which to distinguish the one from the other. Hence we often mistake God's thought entirely. The pains which he sends upon the good for discipline we may mistake for retribution and assume to be only tokens of his wrath. The good things he grants to the wicked may be for their moral trial, and in no sense a proof of his approbation. These points, brief compared with the magnitude of the subject, bear upon the just explanation of those apparent anomalies in the present administration of God's moral government over the race to which our passage alludes.

15. Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labor the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun.

Mirth is not the best word here, because being merry and mirthful involve commonly the idea of frivolity—the absence of all serious thought and of all sense of our relations to God. Enjoyment, rejoicing, give the sense of the Hebrew much better. This Hebrew word is used more than any other for "rejoicing before the Lord," and "rejoicing in the Lord," especially in sacred worship and in grateful praise and trust; *e. g.*, Lev 23: 40 and Deut. 12: 7, 12, 18, and Ps. 9: 2 and 32: 11 and 85: 6, etc. Solomon commends the free-hearted and cheerful enjoyment of our daily bread and of all the good which God provides for in our physical constitution, for this remains with us, cleaves to us as the good of our labor while we live. Yet he carefully suggests that it is God who gives us this life and all its enjoyments. They should therefore be accepted and enjoyed *as his gifts* in the spirit of filial obedience and true gratitude.——The same sentiment has appeared before, chap. 2: 24 and 3: 12, 13, 22, guarded there, moreover, against abuse by the same beautiful and pertinent suggestion that this is "the gift of God," and that we have even these most common blessings of life from his gracious hand and parental heart.

16. When I applied mine heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth; (for also *there is that* neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes:)

17. Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man can not find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labor to seek *it* out, yet he shall not find *it;* yea further; though a wise *man* think to know *it,* yet shall he not be able to find *it.*

"To see the business." The word for "business" is the same which is rendered "travail" in chap. 2: 26 and 3: 10, having obviously here the same sense as there, viz.: selfish, pleasure-seeking toil for earthly good—thought of, moreover, as altogether

unavailing, futile, and vain. Solomon applied his mind to comprehend by deep research the methods, the laws, and the results of such intense pursuit of worldly good. He saw some men overtasking themselves so utterly that day and night they had no sleep. When he came to study this pleasure-seeking toil and travail in the light of God's works in providence, so conducted as usually to frustrate human calculations and baffle the most persistent and pains-taking endeavors, he found himself unable to fathom these depths. With all his labor he could not master this vast and complicated problem. There would be things occurring under the providence of God that were too deep for him.——Plainly "*the* work of God," which is the subject of remark in v. 17, is the same which is spoken of in chap. 3: 1–15, viz.: those agencies in providence which shape man's earthly destiny and usually frustrate his pursuit of worldly good, despite of his shrewdest plans and most laborious efforts.——It *is* a great deep, too great for human wisdom, unaided of God himself, to fathom. Revelations from God, made subsequent to the age of Solomon, have brought up many things out of those otherwise unfathomable depths; yet still when we seek to apply these more full revelations to specific cases, we are often compelled to desist, saying: "Who by searching can find out God? Who can find out the Almighty unto perfection?" ——A mournful interest attaches to the efforts of such a mind as Solomon's, reaching forth and tasking its gigantic powers to the utmost to master this great problem of God's ways in providence as bearing upon the life-long efforts of men to secure worldly good. All that mortal man could do with such light from revelation as he had before him, we may suppose he achieved. Yet after his utmost outreachings of thought, how did he perpetually fall back upon the sad conclusion—no human wisdom can find it out!—— Let us not omit to notice that these confessions and statements are the very things to say to the pleasure-seeking men for whom Solomon was specially writing. Nothing else could give them a deeper impression of the utter futility of the selfish pursuit of worldly good. I can not tell you altogether how or why it is, but so it is (Solomon would say to them), you can not withstand the Infinite God! His providential government of this world will surely frustrate your pleasure-seeking endeavors and your utmost grasping after worldly good. The Almighty One is against you and you can not prosper. I can not fathom the mystery of this great fact; I can give you no clew to the understanding of it so that you can master the problem and devise means to counter-work its untoward influences. The thing is too deep for me. There is, therefore, no help for you but to desist from such a life, be content with the moderate pleasures which God freely bestows, and above all, "fear God and keep his commandments."

# CHAPTER IX.

The subject under discussion at the close of chapter 8 is continued. God shapes the destiny of the righteous (v. 1); yet even they are in some respects under the common law that controls the life and death of all men in this world (v. 2). This law, affecting the good and the bad uniformly, seems to be in some respects an evil (v. 3). Thought of strictly with reference to this world, death brings an end to all labor, and all knowledge and reward (vs. 4–6); therefore let men accept in quiet and grateful enjoyment the good things of earth which God bestows (vs. 7–9), and do what belongs to this life with all diligence (v. 10), for all human labors are contingent and uncertain in their results (vs. 11,12). Wisdom is even better than strength, though not always duly honored (vs. 13–18).

1. For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, *are* in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred *by* all *that is* before them.

Critics give the word for "declare," the sense of "search out." "I applied all this to my heart; I brought it home to my mind, to search it out thoroughly [and I found] that "the righteous, the wise, and their works are in the hand of God" who cares for them and shapes their destinies in his love and wisdom. Also this did I search out, viz., that no man knoweth either love or hatred as to all that is before him; *i. e.*, he does not know beforehand which he shall receive from his fellow-men; their love or their hatred. The future is all unknown to him.——Neither the Hebrew accents nor the words of the passage favor the English version—"*by* all that is before them." There is no word meaning "*by*." It is better therefore to read either—in respect to all that is before them; or, as a distinct sentence: "No man knoweth either love or hatred; all is before them," *i. e.*, in the unknown future.—— This testimony respecting the righteous is peculiarly grateful in such a connection as this, not only because this truth is inexpressibly precious at all times and under all possible circumstances, but because it is refreshing to see that the author in the depth of his perplexities in reference to both God's providential and moral government over men, when facing events and complications which tasked his mind to the utmost, could yet fall back upon this precious truth—that the righteous, the wise, and their works, are all in the hand of God, the object of his unceasing love and care.

2. All *things come* alike to all: *there is* one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good, and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him

that sacrificeth not: as *is* the good, so *is* the sinner; *and* he that sweareth, as *he* that feareth an oath.

What are these "all things?" What is the author thinking of, and *of what things* does he affirm that they befall the righteous and the wicked alike and without discrimination as to their character and relations? This is the vital point in the interpretation of the passage.——It can not be supposed that he meant to say that the wicked and their works are in the hand of God in the same sense in which he affirms this of the righteous and the wise. If he had meant this, he need not and would not have specified the righteous especially as enjoying this care. Nor does he mean to say that the same final destiny and punishment will befall both the righteous and the wicked; for he held the very opposite of this. (See chap. 8: 12, 13.)——But guided by the context, we may conclude that his mind is upon the unknown contingencies of this mortal state. No man knoweth what is before him here in the line of the good or evil things of this life. Sickness, suffering, the plague, the cholera, the frailties of the body, the infirmities of old age, and death itself—all these evils and the causes that produce them, befall every class of men, good or bad, substantially alike. All these things come under one common law of our present earthly state. The Great Father "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Mat. 5: 45). For the best of reasons there is no attempt to discriminate in these allotments between good men and bad. The great law of our present existence—"Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return," makes no exception in favor of even the best friends of God. To this great universal law, I understand the passage before us to allude.

3. This *is* an evil among all *things* that are done under the sun, that *there is* one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness *is* in their heart while they live, and after that *they go* to the dead.

To the view of Solomon, and indeed to the limited views of most men, it will seem in some respects an evil, that, as to the points here considered, the lot of both good men and bad is common. It looks as though God had no special favors for his friends; no special displeasure toward his enemies. It suggests perhaps the doubt whether there be indeed a God above who befriends the righteous and is displeased with the wicked. This is the point that troubles the author. It seems to him that one result of this common ordering of the events of life is that men's hearts are the more full of evil and of madness. They see no God. Some of the greatest events of human life disclose no moral discrimination as between the righteous and the wicked; so that they say—"It is just as well to be wicked as to be righteous; we shall live out our time, no matter how wicked we may be, and the righteous can

fare no better than this. We see no retribution for sin in this life; who then will believe that there is any to be feared hereafter —if indeed there be any hereafter ?——This madness, he says, abides in them long as they live. After that—what? "*To the dead*" [they go]. The omission of the verb *go* in the original is peculiarly expressive: "After that—*to the dead!*"

4. For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

For the verb translated "is joined," there are in Hebrew different readings. The marginal reading transposes the first two radical letters of the textual reading. Following the text, we have the sense—"For who is excepted?"—*i. e.*, not included under this universal doom of mortality. The marginal reading, preferred by most of the critics, is followed by the English and by all the older versions, thus:—"Whoever is still attached to the living, as to him there is hope." The meaning seems to be—He is an object of trust; more or less confidence may be reposed in him; he *is* something; has some power of accomplishment, for even a dog, contemptible as he was in the east, could do more and was more an object of hope or of fear, than a dead lion. This is doubtless a proverb. The author meant to say strongly that so far as this world is concerned, there is no power in the dead, and therefore no ground of confidence or trust in them. This he proceeds to show more in detail.——This word rendered "hope" occurs elsewhere only in Isa. 36: 4 and in a parallel passage 2 K. 18: 19. "What *confidence* [object of hope or trust] is this wherein thou trustedst?"

5. For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.

6. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion forever in any *thing* that is done under the sun.

The difficulties in these verses come of assuming that they speak of the future state and particularly of the condition of human souls after death. Assuming that they speak of souls *in respect to their relations to the future world*, we are troubled, for the author seems to deny to them consciousness, knowledge and reward, if not even existence.——Prof. Stuart would fain get over this difficulty by supposing that these are the words, not of the author, but of an objector to his doctrines: Hengstenberg, by saying—"Such is the language of natural reason to whose eye all seems dark and gloomy that lies beyond the present scene because it fails in this world to discern the traces of divine retribution." The Spirit says on the contrary—"The spirit returns to God who gave it."——These methods are essentially the same

the vital point in each being that these are not the sentiments of the author. I have more difficulty with this exposition than with the passage itself. For what right have we to say that these are not the words of the author? He has given us no hint that these are some other man's words and not his. He says these things just as he says all the other things in his book. They come to us with the same external evidence to prove them his words that we have for any thing else he has written.——Let us rather go back to the root of this difficulty. As said above it lies in assuming that the author is here giving his views of the state of human souls after death *not with reference to this world, but to that other world* whither they have gone. May it not be that the error lies in precisely this assumption, and that the relief will come by assuming that he speaks of the souls of the dead *only with reference* to their relations to this present world of ours?——Let us consider carefully the thought which immediately precedes; a living dog is better than a dead lion; *i. e.*, better for any effect *in this world.* The dead animal—the lion—had incomparably the most power while he lived. But now that he is dead, nobody fears him; he has even less power than the meanest of animals—a dog. The efficiency of the dead as to this world—the question whether they are objects of fear or of hope here in time—is the point with which the passage opens.——Mark also the closing thought: "Neither have they any more a portion forever in all that is done under the sun." This is in the same strain with which the passage opened in v. 4. They are dead as to all things here. How much soever they may, like Dives, have amassed of earthly good, they have no portion in it or of it for evermore. They have no agency or profit in any thing done beneath the sun. But this (be it noticed) does not say they have no portion of good or ill *in the retributions of the future world.*——I give below a paraphrase of these two verses which in my view is sustained by the following considerations: (1.) As already intimated it is in harmony with the course of thought with which the passage is introduced in v. 4 and with which it closes in v. 6.——(2.) It coincides with the logic of the passage itself, especially in the last half of v. 5.——(3.) It relieves the passage of its doctrinal difficulties, viz., its supposed denial of a future conscious existence and its contradiction of the great doctrine of a future retribution—a doctrine which Solomon in this very book affirms with most solemn emphasis.——"For the living know as to death that they shall die; but the dead know nothing *as to the living*, nor as to any of the scenes and events of this earthly life, neither have they any more reward *in the line of fame and honor*, for the memory of them is forgotten. They may have labored hard for an immortal name among the living of earth, but this reward fails them, for no remembrance of them long survives their disappearance from among men. Also their love and their hatred and their envy have long ago perished; all died with them and are no longer of the least concern to the living whom their love can not help nor their hatred harm;

neither have they any longer a portion forever in all that is done under the sun. They may have a portion elsewhere: of that there is no occasion now to speak; but they have no portion in the way of active agency or proper reward in anything done on the earth."——This paraphase assumes that the author is not speaking at all of the departed dead with reference to their consciousness—their happiness or their misery in that other world; but only with reference to their relations *to this world* and to its events and interests.——The reader will notice especially the argument in v. 5. The dead know nothing and have no more reward *because* the very memory of them is forgotten. This cause is not that they have themselves lost all memory and consciousness, but is that *the living men of this world have lost all remembrance of them.* But this is no reason why they should know nothing in the other world; it is no reason why they have no more a reward in that other world. The reasoning is good only upon the assumption that the author is thinking of the dead in view of their relations *to this world* and not to *the world to come.*——I suggest, moreover, that the form of the statement—"The dead know not any thing," is determined by a sort of antithesis with the clause immediately before it, thus: For the living know as to death that they must die; but the dead know as to what transpires here not any thing at all.——It remains to suggest that in this construction the passage bears most pertinently and forcibly upon the vanity of laying up immense stores for future enjoyment, whether in the line of wealth or of posthumous remembrance and fame. Thousands in every age toil to accumulate indefinitely more than they could ever use in a century—to whom Solomon would say here: "What will all that wealth avail you *after you are dead*? Other thousands, especially in the ancient oriental world, exhausted the great labors of a life-time to build mausoleums and tombs for themselves that should immortalize their names among the living. In the rocks of ancient Petra, the capital of Edom, the traveler of to-day may find sepulchers chiselled out in the eternal rock, witnessing to the folly of some Edomite sage who thought he might thus prevent the remembrance of himself from being ever lost. Or go to Egypt; study her pyramids and the testimony, now generally accepted, that they were reared with almost infinite labor, each to be the burial place of some one man (a king perhaps) who meant to defy the power of oblivion over *his* name and *his* glory. Alas, was there not occasion enough to say to such men: "The dead know not any thing of what transpires among the living;" nor have they any more a reward on earth, however much they may have sought it, for the very remembrance of them is perished, however stubbornly they may have fought against this result and labored to make their earthly name immortal.

The reader will notice that Solomon differs entirely from those of our time who suppose our world to be full of the presence and agency of departed spirits—cognizant of all that transpires, intermeddling with all mundane affairs, manifesting themselves in

rappings and thumpings, in table-tippings and answerings from the realms of the dead. Solomon's doctrine squarely denies the possibility of any such thing.

7. Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works.

8. Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment.

9. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that *is* thy portion in *this* life, and in thy labor which thou takest under the sun.

Here is a turn in the course of thought. The author would say to his readers—Instead of toiling hopelessly and vainly for huge masses of wealth which you can never enjoy, or for posthumous fame and glory that you can never know of and that will surely be engulfed and sunk under the waves of oblivion, I counsel you to enjoy with quiet satisfaction your daily bread, thankful that God accepts your work. Let your garments betoken inward purity and true joy; living happily with one wife (not miserably with many), even with the wife whom thou lovest, all the days of thy transient life, for this is thy portion of good for thy labor in this earthly life.——We have met substantially the same counsel in chap. 2: 24 and 3: 12, 13, 22, and 5: 18, 19, and 8: 15.—— "Drink thy wine with a *good* heart," better expresses the Hebrew than "merry."——"For God accepteth thy works;" *i. e.*, provided they are done in the spirit here enjoined.——Garments of white were for joyful occasions; black and coarse garments betokened sadness and mourning. White was the natural symbol of purity as well as joy—indeed of purity as the source and fountain of joy. The reader will recall the white robes of angels and saints as seen Mk. 16: 5 and Mat. 17: 2 (the transfiguration); also Rev. 3: 4, 5 and 7: 9.——Oil upon the head is called "the oil of joy" (Isa. 61: 3) and the oil of gladness (Ps. 45: 7).——This testimony against polygamy, coming from Solomon, is specially noticeable. Do not, as I have done, multiply wives foolishly and wickedly, to your sorrow and to the poisoning of all your domestic happiness; but live in joy with the wife whom thou lovest, for such is the portion God giveth thee for thy labors under the sun, *i. e.*, in this earthly life. Solomon says not a word in all this book in commendation of polygamy. His condemnation of his own course in this respect, though somewhat indirect, is yet decisive and emphatic.

10. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do *it* with thy might; for *there is* no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.

The Hebrew accents favor this reading:— "Whatsoever thy

hand findeth to do with thy might, do it." Any thing that comes to hand so that you can take hold of it vigorously and do it to useful purpose, do it without fail or delay. Why? Because you can not resume and finish it in that grave—the under-world—whither thou art going. He does not mean to say that nothing is done *there*, in that other world; but that no effort of yours, however wise or intelligent, can reach back from that world to this to prosecute and complete your labors left unfinished here at your death. So construed, his language bears to the point in hand—*viz.*, the doing of whatever work God gives you to do here while your life and life-power may last.——The reader will observe that v. 10 and also vs. 7–9 confirm the construction put upon vs. 4–6. Enjoy and accomplish all God gives you to enjoy or to accomplish *here*, for you can neither do or enjoy any thing *as to this world* when you have passed away from earth.

11. I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race *is* not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.

12. For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in a snare; so *are* the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.

Taking still another and a new view of human labor ("I turned and saw"), I observed that even the most assiduous and well-directed efforts of men sometimes fail. The swiftest do not always win the race; the strongest lose the battle; the wisest miss their bread; "time and chance" seem more potent over human destiny than man's own best endeavors. Casualties will happen; no man knows his hour of death; the snare sometimes falls suddenly on men as fishes are caught in a net; so that we must admit there is an overruling power higher than human that shapes the destiny of men.

13. This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it *seemed* great unto me:

14. *There was* a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it.

15. Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man.

Yet wisdom sometimes accomplishes most extraordinary feats of success. A poor wise man saved a little city against a great king. Yet, much as this poor man deserved of his fellow-citizens,

they shamefully forgot him. The real value of wisdom often fails of being duly acknowledged.——To attempt, as some critics have done, to find in history the specific city here referred to seems to me altogether futile. The author has not named it; how then can we?

16. Then said I, Wisdom *is* better than strength: nevertheless the poor man's wisdom *is* despised, and his words are not heard.

17. The words of wise *men are* heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools.

18. Wisdom *is* better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good.

In the phrase—"The words of wise men are heard in quiet," it is not clear in the English version whether it is the speaking or the hearing that is done "in quiet." The Hebrew shows that at least the *hearing* is done in quiet—*i. e.*, in the hour of calm and thoughtful stillness; while the antithesis with the boisterous outcry of a foolish king among fools implies that the wise men thought of here spake also in a modest and quiet way. So speaking and so being heard, their words have great force.——Wisdom is better than war-weapons, even in the defense of a city, as the case above cited shows: over against which stands the closing thought—"One sinner"—a man who *misses the mark* through lack of wisdom—"destroyeth much good." "Good" is used here, not in the moral but in the physical sense, as is not unfrequent in this author, *e. g.*, chap. 6: 6. This erring and wicked man destroys cities and human lives; no public interests are safe in his hands. —— It is no doubt equally true that one sinner destroys much good in the moral sense—in the line of the morals and the souls of men. But the context does not favor this sense in this passage.

## CHAPTER X.

This chapter, closely connected with the preceding, is made up of miscellaneous statements, many of them proverbial, touching the excellence of wisdom and the mischief of folly.

1. Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savor: *so doth* a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom *and* honor.

In sentiment this verse repeats in a different form, that of the clause next before it—"One sinner destroyeth much good." A

little folly pollutes and mars the character of one who is otherwise noble in point of wisdom and honor. The words, "in reputation," do not assume that this is reputation merely and not character. The Hebrew says, one who is precious (or glorious) in respect to wisdom and honor. Even upon such a man, a little folly acts like small dead flies in precious ointment, which as here said (Heb.) produce fermentation and offensive odor.——The world is full of illustrations of this sentiment. It is obviously and painfully true that many men of otherwise noble qualities have little foibles, foolish habits, which mar their character and greatly damage their influence.——Probably this verse and many others in this chapter were current proverbs in the days of the author.

2. A wise man's heart *is* at his right hand; but a fool's heart at his left.

"Heart," here, as often, in the sense of understanding. "At the right hand," means skillful and adapted for ready and effective use; "at the left"—awkward, blundering, unskilled. Perhaps the proverb involves also the old idea that the left is ill-starred, of evil omen, unpropitious. "Seen over the left," according to these notions, was a bad omen. The two ideas—unskillful for use, and of evil augury—might be united in the left. So the fool's wit is of little worth. It is wanting just when and where he most needs it. He seems fated to blunder.

3. Yea also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth *him*, and he saith to every one *that* he *is* a fool.

"Walking by the way" I take to mean his every-day life, rather than precisely his passing along the street, although the latter sense is possible.—The last clause is ambiguous, since it may mean either that he says this of himself, or that he says it of every one else. I incline to think that we need not press the word "say" to its strictest literal sense—that of using these very words; but may take it to mean, He *seems* to say; he shows very plainly—that he is a fool. Then the verse will mean that in the common affairs of life, the fool's wisdom fails him and he shows himself to all men to be a fool. The statement is more universally true in this sense than in the other, for it is scarcely a fact that every foolish man says of every man he meets, Thou art a fool.

4. If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacifieth great offenses.

"*The* ruler," the one before spoken of (chap. 9: 17), is conceived of as a wicked, foolish man. If his spirit becomes exasperated against thee, leave not thy standing, *i. e.*, thy steadfastness of principle and of self-possession; but bear thyself meekly, modestly, quietly; for so a spirit otherwise ripe for "great offenses"

may be pacified. The "great offenses" are thought of as those of the ruler, not of thyself, the party addressed. An exasperated feeling, ready for extreme measures, may be mollified by a meek and gentle deportment, even without abandoning any thing that is right and true in thy standing.

5. There is an evil *which* I have seen under the sun, as an error *which* proceedeth from the ruler:

6. Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place.

7. I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth.

The same foolish ruler perpetrates another egregious blunder which is a great evil in affairs of state. He exalts fools (not "folly" in the abstract) to many high places, and thrusts down the rich (assumed to be noble and worthy men) into a low place. "Servants upon horses" are in positions of honor, riding on horses being one of the prerogatives of office and royalty; while princes are seen walking like servants on foot. The idea is that the foolish ruler commits a great mistake and does a great evil by thrusting out of office worthy men and promoting the unworthy.——This practice has always been common in the despotic governments of the East. Men of wealth and of worth are hurled out of office for the sake of confiscating their property, and men of low rank and of no merit are elevated to power. No wonder Solomon should account it a great evil.

8. He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh a hedge, a serpent shall bite him.

9. Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith; *and* he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby.

These are probably proverbial expressions. The digging of a pit, *i. e.*, to entrap and catch wild animals, or as a snare for fellow-men, would expose a man to fall into it himself. As serpents found their hiding-place in hedges, whoso should break them would expose himself to be bitten. Both these acts may imply evil intention, and so would challenge the retributions of justice. The cases made in v. 9 are simply difficult but useful occupations which require skill to prevent personal harm. Wisdom is profitable to direct here, as well as in the case next mentioned.

10. If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom *is* profitable to direct.

It is of course a case of wisdom whether it will pay best to sharpen the dull tool, or to put in the requisite additional strength. The case is adduced simply to illustrate the practical value of wisdom.

11. Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment; and a babbler is no better.

Accepting the general construction which appears in our English version, I should still prefer to read *slanderer* rather than "babbler." It is the slanderer who will bite you as surely as the unenchanted serpent unless you have the wisdom to charm him into a better spirit, or to put yourself beyond his power to harm. ——The Lexicons of Gesenius and of Fuerst give to the phrase rendered "babbler"* the sense of *enchanter*—one who has the skill to charm serpents. I understand them to give the passage this construction: Inasmuch as the serpent will bite unless enchanted, there is no advantage to the enchanter (*i. e.*, unless he has the wisdom to use his skill promptly and so prevent the biting). The context treats of the superior advantages of wisdom over folly; in harmony with which this construction would be in point. The objection to their view of the passage is that it requires so much to be supplied.

12. The words of a wise man's mouth *are* gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself.

The antithesis here lies between the words of wise men and the words of fools in the point of value and of results to themselves. The wise man's words are gracious, *i. e.*, pleasant, agreeable, conciliatory, winning the good will of others and fraught with good to himself. On the contrary, the lips of a fool (by means of his foolish words) will engulf him in ruin. His indiscreet words will forever frustrate his efforts and sink his cause.—— As the lips are associated with swallowing, there was special point in using this term to denote his words. His lips (by virtue of the foolish words he utters) become a vortex to engulf the miserable man to his ruin!

13. The beginning of the words of his mouth *is* foolishness: and the end of his talk *is* mischievous madness.

His talk begins with folly and ends with ruinous madness. All is folly, only waxing more and more so, with yet more ruinous consequences to himself.

14. A fool also is full of words: a man can not tell what shall be: and what shall be after him, who can tell him?

The connection between the first clause and the rest of the verse may be either that the fool prates excessively about the unknown future, building air-castles and talking boastfully of his great plans; or that his talk is reckless of future consequences. He is full of words that may have tremendous power against him

* בְּעַל הַלָּשׁוֹן

in the future, and yet he heeds nothing. The latter is most in keeping with the course of thought in the context.

15. The labor of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city.

The fool works at immense disadvantage because he lacks the wit to do well the most common things—the illustration of which is, *knowing the way to the city*—a thing that every man but a fool would be supposed to know. If he can not follow the great thoroughfare of travel where every body walks, what does he know, and what can he do?

16. Woe to thee, O land, when thy king *is* a child, and thy princes eat in the morning!

Wisdom is good and folly especially bad *in the case of kings.* Alas! for the land whose king is a child—not in years so much as in wisdom and especially in self-control. As to age, the Hebrew word for "child" might apply to any period from two years to thirty; but in such a connection it has the sense of *childishness.* Isaiah (3: 4) uses it: "I will give *children* to be their princes;" parallel to which is this: "And babes shall rule over them."——Early breakfasts were not in good repute, nor the use of wine in the morning hours of the day. References to the use of wine early in the day may be seen (Isa. 5: 11): "Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning that they may follow strong drink," etc.; and also Ac. 2: 15. The next verse shows that the eating here disapproved is feasting coupled with the use of wine.

17. Blessed *art* thou, O land, when thy king *is* the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!

The counterpart of v. 16, this pronounces the land blessed whose king is of noble birth, and whose princes eat at the suitable time, and for purposes of nutrition and physical invigoration, and not for banqueting and drinking to intoxication. Gluttony and intemperance in strong drink least of all become kings—men bearing responsibilities so grave and momentous. "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes strong drink, lest they drink and forget the law and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted" (Prov. 31: 4).——"Thy king the son of nobles," reminds us that in the author's age much was thought of the hereditary rights of kings. It helped to dispose of the always vexing question of *succession* to the crown.——There is no reason to suppose that in this verse and the preceding, Solomon thinks of any particular countries. His remarks apply to any country whatever.

18. By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through.

Slack and sluggish hands neglect repairs and leave the timbers of the house to rot and its roof to leak.

19. A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry: but money answereth all *things*.

Speaking of sensual men, the meaning seems to be that they pervert even their common meals (Heb. their "bread") into laughter, and their wine (they say) makes life joyful; their money (they being rich) answereth all purposes. They have every thing that heart can wish. The description obviously looks toward the case of the wealthy who indulge in gross sensuality in their feasts. The next verse favors the supposition that he has in mind gluttonous and drunken kings.

20. Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bed-chamber; for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter.

Though you see great faults in your king, and in your rich neighbors, be careful how you give utterance to severe words against them. Some unseen bird of the air may catch and carry the sound, and your indiscreet words may involve you in serious evil.——The word rendered "thought" will admit the sense—the *place* of thought, the study—corresponding to the private bed-chamber in the parallel clause. It can scarcely mean, in thy unspoken thought, since the supposition is that some bird of the air will carry the *voice*—the spoken word.——This is one of the precepts of wisdom. Do not expose yourself to collision with the powerful by needless maledictions upon their life, even though it be wicked and sensual.——Solomon may have been aware of a growing disaffection toward himself and his administration—the same which developed itself so manifestly after his death. However this may have been, it may be said that this counsel was not bad for those times and for the outlying countries where kings were often immoral, and kingdoms were misgoverned, and where moreover no means of redress for these grievances lay within the reach of the individual subject. Then to bear in silence and in patience was the part of wisdom.

# CHAPTER XI.

Critics differ somewhat in regard to the course of thought in vs. 1–6. I understand the author to say—Prepare for the disasters of life by making friends with your benefactions while you are prosperous (v. 1): multiply those friends, for evil times will come (v. 2); the causes of great calamities are inwrought into the system of this sinning world, and their effects are more than transient (v. 3); be not niggardly in this outlay for insurance against life's evils (v. 4); there will be things in the divine administration which you can not fathom (v. 5); be diligent and use all appropriate means of success in reliance on God for results (v. 6). ——The remaining verses of the chapter are in another strain. Life is precious and God has filled this world with many sources of pleasure; yet in the midst of your joy, forget not that days of darkness will come (vs. 7, 8). Let the young man enjoy the vigor of youth and its legitimate pleasures, yet evermore bearing in mind that God holds him responsible for all his moral life and will bring him into judgment (v. 9). Let him therefore banish discontent from his heart, and, observing the laws of health, prolong his youthful vigor to the utmost, for childhood and youth are subject to vanity—the failure and loss of earthly good (v. 10).

1. Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.

The figure used here is found by some in the sowing of grain upon the fields while yet under water in the process of irrigation, or from the inundation of swollen streams; and by others in the freighting of grain over the waters to distant markets—the returns from which might be only "after many days." In either case "bread" would mean the grain of which bread is made. An allusion to commerce seems to me the more probable as being more germain to Solomon's personal life, and as corresponding somewhat better with the terms here used. If seed-sowing had been in mind, he would naturally have said "seed" and "sowing," as in v. 6. The Hebrew word for "cast" means properly "send forth," and applies readily to the freighting of a merchant vessel with grain for commerce. The history records that Solomon's navy of Tharshish made voyages of three years' duration (1 K. 10: 22), and that in his trade with Tyre, grain was one of his staple exports (1 K. 5: 11). Ezekiel's account in detail of the trade of Tyre is to the same purport (Ezek. 27: 17).——But whichever is the figure used, the sense is ultimately the same. Dispense thy charities liberally and look for returns in the distant future. The policy is the same which his lord commended in his unjust steward because he had done wisely; "making to one's self friends of the mammon of unrighteousness," that in the time of failure "they may receive you into their habitations."

2. Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.

"Give a portion to seven"—the usual round indefinite number; but do not stop at any definite point; give also to the eighth: and by implication, give still to more if you can; for which the reason here assigned is—"For thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth." Evil will come; you can not forecast its precise form or time; therefore be in readiness by having previously secured friends to stand by you in your calamities.——The usage of definite numbers for the indefinite idea of many is very common in the Hebrew writings. (See Amos 1: 3, 6, 9.) "For three transgressions and for four." Also Micah 5: 5. "We shall raise against him seven shepherds and eight principal men." Also Prov. 30: 18, 21, 24.

3. If the clouds be full of rain, they empty *themselves* upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be.

Calamities will come by a common law of human life, even as great storms come in the course of nature, and, coming, hurl down the trees of the forest to lie where they fall. That is, the effects of these calamities are more than transient, and are not easily remedied. Sometimes these calamities come in clusters, reminding us of the adage—"It never rains but it pours." Provide, therefore, wisely and abundantly against these seasons of disaster.

4. He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.

This and many other sayings in this connection were doubtless proverbs in current use. If the husbandman was too particular in regard to a favorable state of the wind, he might, often, miss of sowing at all: if he studied the clouds too anxiously he would not reap, and so would lose all, through not sowing or not gathering in his harvests. Sentiment: Be not close and niggardly in providing these friends against your time of need. It were better to run some small risk on some one of the eight or twenty than to get none and lose all.

5. As thou knowest not what *is* the way of the spirit, *nor* how the bones *do grow* in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.

There are and will be things in God's providential administration of human affairs which thou canst not fathom to the bottom—just as in the processes of nature referred to, we are compelled to

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confess our ignorance. Where animal life come from, what it is in its essential nature, and many of its laws, are matters too deep for our philosophy.

6. In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both *shall be* alike good.

Therefore use wisdom and all due diligence. Let no hopeful means of good be omitted, sowing thy seed morning by morning, and at evening still let thy hand be active and thy heart earnest; for thou canst not tell which of the many things shall be successful. Do your whole duty and then calmly leave the issues with God.——So much for wisdom in the affairs of life, and particularly in making provision against its unknown and unavoidable calamities.

7. Truly the light *is* sweet, and a pleasant *thing it is* for the eyes to behold the sun:

8. But if a man live many years, *and* rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh *is* vanity.

There are rich comforts and joys in human life, and some of the best of them, like the light of day and the sweetness of the sunshine, are open to the masses of mankind -to the poor no less than to the rich; to the slave and to the subject no less than to the master and to the king.——But if a man live many years (as some do not), let him rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness (calamity), for they shall be many. In the midst of the unbroken joys of youth and of prosperous life, let no man forget that far other scenes may be before him; that days of darkness will follow these days of light, for they surely will, and they may be many. All that cometh is subject to vanity. It has the nature of intrinsic emptiness and may prove an utter failure, despite of the best appearances to-day.

9. Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these *things* God will bring thee into judgment.

10. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth *are* vanity.

Some have supposed that these verses are solemn irony. Go on, thou young man, to enjoy thy youthful vigor; make thy heart cheerful; do what seemeth good in thine eyes; but know assuredly that God will require it of thee in the judgment. Know thou that

for this self-indulgence thy judgments from God's hand must be fearful in this life, and yet more appalling in the last great day! ——So it has been sometimes construed; yet, as it seems to me, erroneously. For (1.) It is by no means necessary to explain the things here recommended or permitted as being sinful. It is not in itself sinful that a young man should rejoice in his youth—enjoying his youthful vigor and health; nor that his heart should be cheerful; nor that he should walk in ways pleasant and agreeable to himself, in harmony with the laws of his being, provided, however, always that he regulate his pursuit of pleasure *by a sense of his moral responsibilities to God.* It is vital here to draw the line between admissible cheerfulness, legitimate physical and social enjoyments on the one hand, and on the other sinful indulgences, injurious if not even ruinous to one's self or to others.——(2.) The context forbids the construction which makes these verses ironical. "The light is sweet," (and of course it is good and right to enjoy it), and "a pleasant thing it is to behold the sun," and did not God give us this pleasure to be accepted and enjoyed thankfully? "If a man live many years, let him rejoice in them all" (this is the true sense of the original), yet let him remember the days of darkness"—sure to come—and let this remembrance temper his enjoyment of the good things God gives him and make him the more grateful for them while they last. All this is serious and not ironical. The same strain ought, therefore, to be carried on throughout the passage.——(3.) The numerous parallel passages in the book suffice to settle this point definitely. They have come repeatedly under our consideration, and can by no means be explained as being irony. (See chap. 2: 24 and 3: 12, 13, 22, and 5: 18–20 and 8: 15.) We must then include the passage before us in this class, and explain it as referring to the legitimate enjoyments of youth, bearing in mind, however, that the author wisely guards against excess and abuse by solemnly assuring the young man that in reference to this whole period of his life and to all its special and abundant sources of enjoyment, *God will bring him into judgment*—not to condemn him for the wholesome enjoyment of youthful vigor, but for its sinful abuse;—not for any pleasures that are legitimate, but for all that are illegitimate, pernicious, morally wrong.——The sense of the last verse seems to be—Put away discontent from your heart, and physical evils from your body. Cultivate the spirit of a cheerful contentment, and by carefully observing the laws of health, put from you, far as possible, the ills that flesh is heir to. God made your mind and body for much enjoyment; be careful, therefore, to study and obey the laws of life and happiness pertaining to both mind and body; for at the best childhood and youth are transient, and full of vanity.

## CHAPTER XII.

Let the young, rejoicing in their youthful freshness, beauty, and strength, yet remember their Creator before the evils of old age come on, and because those evils or an early death will surely come (1–6): death and its results appear (v. 7.) The preacher closes with the reassertion of his great theme and with some account of his book (vs. 8–12); and then with his final inference from all his facts and discussions, and with his farewell exhortation (vs. 13, 14). .

1. Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them:

This verse stands in close relation with chap. 11: 7–10, and especially vs. 9, 10, and should not have been separated in the arrangement of chapters. The young man, rejoicing in his youth, and passing cheerfully along through those days of health, hope, and high anticipation and of superabundant physical life, is exhorted to remember his Creator even then, in the morning of his youthful years. To "remember one's Creator" is more than simply to remember God. It is to think of God as your personal Creator, the Author of your very being and of all that wealth of blessings which he provides so profusely for the morning period of life. To be thus seriously mindful of our Creator is to feel our obligation to filial obedience and to grateful love and trust. It is to say from the heart—All I am; all I can ever become; all I have or ever can have—are due to my Infinite Creator and Father. Let me hold all my powers as his gift and use them gratefully according to his pleasure and for his honor.——Now obviously there can be no moral obligation more absolute than this which binds a creature to perfect homage, love, and obedience to his Great Creator. Ought not a son to honor his earthly father? But this oughtness is intensified indefinitely when from an earthly father never so worthy we turn to our Heavenly Father whose merits and whose claims on us are indeed absolutely infinite.——The point of the exhortation as it stands here regards the *time when*. Remember *now* thy Creator while yet "youth and years are bright," while yet the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when thou shalt say—I find no pleasure in these days and years. Give to God the full outgushing affections of your young hearts—the warmth and freshness of your earliest love. This is his due, and this is peculiarly acceptable.——It may be supposed, moreover, that the preacher held in contrast before his mind the opposite of the godly youth, viz.: the ungodly young man passing on through a wicked youth and a more wicked manhood—to a godless, comfortless, worn out and wretched old age—to drop at last unwept and unhonored into his

grave, to be remembered no more! By all the miseries of such a life and such an end would he exhort his youthful readers—yea, all the living to whom in the lapse of the ages these words might ever come, to shun such a life and such an end by giving their heart to their great and good Creator in the very morning of life. This I take to be the course of thought and argument in this and the subsequent verses.

2. While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain:

3. In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened,

4. And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low:

5. Also *when* they shall be afraid of *that which is* high, and fears *shall be* in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets:

6. Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.

All critics admit, for none can deny, that these verses describe under imagery more or less poetic, a forlorn, joyless, broken down old age. Yet, upon the question of the precise character of these figures, there is room for diversity of opinion. Instead of attempting to define this diversity in general terms, I propose to paraphrase the passage according to the two prominent theories of figurative conception.——In v. 2, all must agree that the figures are drawn from the natural world, and not from the old man himself. The darkening of the great lights of heaven is one of the most common figures with the Hebrew writers for great and sad calamity. (See Ezek. 32: 7, 8; Isa. 13: 10; Joel 2: 31 and 3: 15; Amos 8: 9; Rev. 6: 12, 13 and Mat. 24: 29.)——The clouds returning after the great rain, when "storm after storm rises dark o'er the way," describe the rainy season of Palestine, when one storm passes away only to make room for another to follow, and a whole fair day is scarcely known. This represents forcibly the gloom and grief that hang over the old age of the ungodly.——The next three verses (3–5), those interpreters who find here the very body—the physical organs and the waning senses of the decrepit old man, would paraphrase thus:—"In the day when the keepers of the house (the old man's arms) become tremulous, and

the strong men (his legs) bow themselves, becoming bent under the infirmities of years; and the grinders (his molar teeth, used chiefly for mastication) cease to work because they are few; and the eyes that look out as from the windows of the head, become dim with growing blindness; and the doors are shut in the streets" —*i. e.*, the lips are closed and little is said through lack of power or of interest; or as others think, the *ears* are shut with deafness: —when the sound of the grinding is low, the voice becoming weak and scarcely audible; or as some, the sound produced in chewing food is low: and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird —wakened very early in his sleepless morning by the bird-songs, he starts from his slumbers: and since, by Hebrew usage, 'daughters of music' means all singers, their being brought low signifies that he loses his power if not also his interest in music. And he is afraid to venture upon what is high; he has fears when abroad in the public way; the almond tree flourishes, betokening his gray hairs; or as others read it, the almond nut which he once loved becomes disgusting, because, having lost his teeth, he can not eat it: the grasshopper becomes a burden through his great weakness to bear any load whatever; and the natural appetites lose their vitality and cease to afford him pleasure in their exercise; because man goeth to his eternal home; mourners follow the mortal remains of the dead through the streets; for the nice, the delicate and wonderful organism of the human frame is broken down, even as the machinery for raising water or the vessels for bearing it away from well or cistern become broken and useless. So death comes and the dust goes back to its mother earth; the spirit rises to God, its author.——This view of these figures (with slight variations) receives the suffrages of probably the major part of the critics.——A somewhat different view deserves our notice. In vs. 3, 4 an *oriental village*, besieged by enemies, dilapidated and half-deserted, going fast to ruin—forms the ground-work of the illustrations. On this hypothesis we might paraphrase thus:—In the day when the city guards—the watchmen—are filled with alarm; when even the strong men bow themselves, weak and faint, under the burden of defending the city; when the grinders at the oriental handmills suspend labor because so few survive to do the work or to be fed by its products: and when the women in their houses no longer look out from their windows with curiosity to see the passing traveler; when the doors are fast shut and bolted toward the streets through fear of assaulting foes; when the sound of the oriental handmill is so low as to be scarcely audible—those sounds which in times of average prosperity you are sure to hear at break of day in every oriental village or encampment; when men start up in fear at the voice of even a bird because it might betoken an assault from their invaders; and all the daughters of music are brought low, for in such a time of pressing calamity and possibly of impending ruin, none could have the heart to sing or the ear to hear it.——In v. 5 the description may perhaps be best applied, in part at least, directly

to the aged man who is afraid of whatever is high; who has fears in the public highway. The blossoming of the almond tree, by oriental usage, may indicate that events are hastening on toward their accomplishment. The almond, first to bloom in spring, gave the earliest promise of a change from winter. As used in symbol by the Lord to Jeremiah (Jer. 1: 12), its significance was—"I will hasten my word to perform it." So God hastens to close up the miserable career of the ungodly old man.——The construction last given to vs. 3, 4 pleases me much better than the first one. That first one seems in many points very harsh, tame, insipid, badly forced, and unpoetic. Especially I can not imagine how an oriental reader could understand by "the sound of the grinding," any thing else but that well-known sound from the handmills of every household each morning for the day's use, or could think of "the daughters of music" as being any other than those singing bands who entertained the people with their songs. So of the entire description. It accords so pertinently with oriental life in a village besieged and imperilled, that I can not bring my mind to accept any other construction. Moreover, an oriental village in which the hum of busy, peaceful life has died away; in which music is heard no longer; even the curiosity of woman fails to bring her to the window to look out abroad; the doors are barred; the watchmen tremble; the soldiers are overborne with their task and every thing betokens capture, sack, and ruin;—such a grouping of scenes is an admirable picture of the failing life-powers, the departing joys, and the impending downfall of the poor old man. Nor does it seem to me in any wise incongruous, for v. 2 unquestionably draws its figures from the great lights of heaven and the storms of the oriental rainy season, and there is nothing that requires us to return to a specific description of the individual man till we reach v. 5. Some of the points of v. 5 may best be applied to him personally.—V. 6 is a beautiful description of the severing of the cords of life which hold the body and soul in their life-communion. Comparing the nice physical organism of the body with the machinery for raising water, the cords snap asunder; the choice bowl that bore the living water is dashed in pieces; the machinery on the action of which animal life hung is broken down—and all is over!

7. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

Then "ashes to ashes, and dust to dust." The dust of the human frame returns to its kindred dust; but the spirit, of far higher nature, the very breath of God (Gen. 2: 7), returns to God who gave it; not to be absorbed again into the essence of the Divine Being; not to lose its personality, its individual consciousness, or its moral responsibility; but to receive from God its reward according to its moral life in the body. "For God will bring every work into judgment with every secret thing whether it be

good or whether it be evil." This doctrine of future retribution forever precludes the pantheistic notion of the absorption of the human soul at death into the being of God himself.——The doctrine that all human souls have their existence directly from God so that he is strictly and properly "the Father of all spirits," appears in both the Old Testament and the New. See Num. 16: 22, where it occurs in the prayer of Moses and Aaron: "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh," etc.; also again in the words of Moses (Num. 27: 16), "Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation," etc. So the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews (12: 9)—"Shall we not be in subjection unto the Father of spirits and live?"——That the soul, thus related to God as its father should return to him at death, is due also and especially to its moral nature and moral relations and responsibilities. That this was the doctrine of the ancient Jewish teachers appears even in the Chaldee paraphrast who translates our verse: "The living spirit will return to stand in judgment before God who gave it to thee."——The same doctrine underlies this Book of Ecclesiastes, cropping out not unfrequently throughout the course of its discussions, and brought forth most distinctly and emphatically at the close. (See chap. 3: 17, 21 and 5: 8 and 8: 8, 12, 13 and 11: 9 and 12: 14.)——And what can be more reasonable? For the gift of intellectual faculties devolves the obligation to know God. The gift of a moral power to obey and love God creates the obligation to obedience and love. "To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (Jam. 4: 17). God therefore has an account to settle with all those beings to whom he has committed such exalted powers, and hence their spirits must return to him at death to meet this responsibility and to render this account.

8. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; all *is* vanity.

Obviously this introduces the closing section of the book—the concluding remarks. Hence he repeats the sentiment which more than any other has been his leading theme—the utter vanity of all things that are merely of the earth—sensual and worldly enjoyments. At the same time this sentiment has a close relation to what has immediately preceded—the infirmities and miseries of a godless old age. If such, he would say, is to be the end of a sinning life, even though protracted into extreme old age and consequently using up and exhausting all there is of sinful pleasure in human life; how justly may we conclude that such a life is an utter vanity! Standing over the grave of the dead sinner who has filled out his four-score years, think how he has lived; how he has worn out life's pleasures, and how few and small they have been; then mark how he dies at last, and say in view of all, if the whole of his life is not "vanity of vanities!" Who can afford to live and die *so?*

9. And moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he

still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, *and* set in order many proverbs.

"And moreover," *i. e.*, in conclusion it remains to say that the preacher being wise still taught, etc. It is not perhaps absolutely certain whether he refers exclusively to this Book of Ecclesiastes, or includes also other literary labors, and specially those writings which are in part or whole embraced in the Book of Proverbs The latter view seems quite probable.

10. The Preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and *that which was* written *was* upright, *even* words of truth.

The preacher studied not only to get useful thoughts but pleasing words in which to express them; and yet not this only, for he was also careful that the things he wrote should be "upright"—*i. e.*, just and good—words of truth.

11. The words of the wise *are* as goads, and as nails fastened *by* the masters of assemblies, *which* are given from one shepherd.

From speaking of his own work, he passes to speak in a more general way of all the words of the wise, with special reference it would seem to the other inspired books of the Old Testament, then extant.——These words of wise men are as goads; they have a piercing, penetrating power. They commend themselves to the good sense of mankind and to their conscience no less, and therefore take fast hold of the human soul. So the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews: "For the word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit," etc. (Heb. 4: 12).——"And as nails driven in (deeply planted in the heart) are the makers of the collection"—this "collection" being the collected words of the wise, and those who make the collection being here put for the collection itself of the sacred writings, even as we now say Moses and Paul, but mean the words they wrote. This seems to be the literal meaning of this somewhat contested passage.——That these collected writings are "given by one shepherd" looks to their common origin in the one revealing Spirit of God. It was as a great and good shepherd, leading his people like a flock into the green pastures of truth, that the Divine Spirit taught holy men of old to speak and write these words of prœminent and superhuman wisdom.——The word translated "assemblies," it is now conceded by the best critics, refers not to assembled persons but to collected manuscripts, constituting the recorded wisdom of the wise and therefore parallel to "the words of the wise" in the first clause, with probable reference moreover to the inspired books then extant.

12. And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books *there is* no end; and much study *is* a weariness of the flesh.

From these sacred books, my son, receive your divine instruction. I have sought, dear reader, in a truly parental spirit, to lead you into the paths of true wisdom. Allow me, therefore, to address you as "my son." Solomon adopts the same mode of address (Prov. 1: 8, 10 and 2: 1 and 3: 1, 10, 21, etc.).——Of making books on a large scale, there is no natural end; one seems to find no place to stop. But much study—the hard labors of the author—are a weariness to the flesh. I shall therefore (says Solomon) close my work and give you in the fewest possible words the grand lesson of this book.——It is in harmony with the entire strain of this book that Solomon should speak in this verse of his own personal experience as an author. If we may suppose him to have been at this writing far advanced in age, the pertinence of these words to his case becomes the more apparent.——If he had in view also the multitude of books other than his, it was quite in place to exhort the reader to spare himself the labor, and not less, the loss, of reading many poor ones, and be content to read, digest, and put in practice the wisdom here laid so briefly before him.

13. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of men.

Closely translated, this is—"The conclusion—the whole matter—let us hear;" *i. e.*, the sum and quintessence of this entire book. "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this . . . of all men"—*i. e.*, is the duty of all men; or we might supply the ellipsis thus; this *belongs* to all men; or this *binds* all—is obligatory on all men; or very fitly thus—"for this all men *should do*." The Hebrew has no word for "duty." And usage will not allow us to read—"This is the whole of man." The Hebrew words for "*whole of man*" are used so frequently and so invariably in the sense—*all men*, the whole race of man—that we can not give them any other sense here. The sentiment therefore must be—*not* this comprises *all* human duty, but *this duty is universal*. It binds all human beings. It belongs to man as a creature of God, made intelligent so that he can know God and with such voluntary powers that he *can* give to his Maker the love of his heart and the service of his life in true obedience to his commandments.

14. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil.

The precise sense I take to be—God will bring into the final judgment every thing done by men, together with every secret thing, whether good or evil; all the unspoken words, all the unuttered thoughts of the heart—every thing whatever that has moral character and therefore comes within the pale of his moral law and government.——Comparing the retributive judgments sent of God upon individuals and nations *in time* with that final judgment which is reserved for men at the end of the world and whose

awards lie in the eternal state, the former relates for the most part, not to secret things, but to patent, open transactions, such as are naturally "known and read of all men;" while the latter distinctively includes "every secret thing"—the thoughts of the heart, unseen by mortal eye; the unuttered murmurings; the rebellious spirit; the persistent purpose to remain a rebel against God despite of his unceasing love and tenderest calls of mercy. These secret sins can not wisely be judged and punished of God until they are fully disclosed both to the sinner himself and to the universe as the ground and reason for the infliction of his righteous penalties. Thus Jude—"To convince all that are ungodly of all their ungodly deeds" (v. 15). The overt, public sins of men and nations are or may be sufficiently known in this world to justify any amount of present retribution which God may deem wise and well for the support of his moral government. The argument is therefore unanswerable which infers that this judgment, since it takes cognizance not only of some secret things, but of "*every* secret thing," must be specially and preëminently that final judgment scene at the end of the world of which both our Lord and his apostles spake with the utmost distinctness and solemnity.——It is vain to assert (as many German critics have done) that Solomon knew nothing of a final judgment. The fact that he had such knowledge does not rest on this one verse alone, and can not therefore be set aside by severing (as they do capriciously) the closing verses of this chapter (8–14) from the rest of the book, and ascribing them to some compiler of much later date. For the doctrine of a future judgment appears repeatedly throughout this book. (See notes on v. 7 above.) It entered deeply into the moral and religious system of its author. He felt in his own moral nature the fitness of it and the demand for it, and he saw in the anomalies and imperfections of moral government in this world that there must be another scene of judgment for the deeds of earth—a complement to this, to even up (so to speak) the jagged surface as it presents itself in this imperfect world; or in his own language, to obviate that striking "vanity which is done upon the earth, whereby there are just men to whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked, and wicked men to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous" (chap. 8: 14). The apparent wrong of such allotments of evil to the righteous and of good to the wicked, Solomon knew must be set right somewhere. Not seeing it done invariably and perfectly in the present world, he inferred that it must be done after the present life shall have closed. Here was an illustration of the doctrine brought out in chap. 3: 11—"God hath done every thing fitly, beautifully in its time. He hath also given to men the idea of eternity without which they could not find out the work that God doeth from the beginning to the end thereof." There is no adequate explanation of the anomalies and irregularities of God's dealings with men as they stand before us in this life, until we take into consideration the grand idea of eternity—the fact of a future eternal life in which retribution will be

made equal and righteous, in perfect harmony with the deeds done in the body, including every secret thing whether good or evil.—— Solomon therefore had a distinct knowledge of a future general judgment, and also of its natural and inevitable result, a subsequent state of retribution. I would not convey the impression that he was indebted for this knowledge exclusively to the sagacious and unaided inferences or even the intuitive affirmations of his own mind. It would not be safe to assume that he was the first man of all the race who possessed this knowledge. The oldest patriarchs, and Moses, and Samuel, and David, may all have had it. It is not important here to debate this question at length. I simply say in brief they *may* have had it. No man can prove the contrary. The fact that the theocracy was in its very nature an *external system*, administered by rewards and punishments *in this world*, needs no other explanation to account for it than this—that it was to be administered by human agents who could not legislate over the heart and could not wield the retributions of eternity. Consequently this fact by no means proves that those fathers had no knowledge of a future judgment and a future retribution. How early God revealed these great facts of his moral government to the race, it may be impossible for us to decide with absolute certainty. Nor are we quite competent to say on authority how much Solomon may have been indebted to direct revelation from God for his knowledge on this subject.——Let it suffice that he had this knowledge. Having it, he used it most appropriately and with august solemnity to enforce upon all men the duty of fearing God and of keeping all his commandments. To the pleasure-loving and pleasure-seeking men of his time before whom his own example had been terribly pernicious, he bears throughout this book a straight-forward, strong, and solemn testimony to the vanity of the life they are living; to the wisdom of accepting with gratitude to God the moderate enjoyments of earthly good which are provided in the simple gratification of the few natural wants of the human system; and then he exhorts them to hold forever fresh in their mind the thought of a present God, every-where and always to be feared and obeyed; whose *will* should be the great study of mortals, accepted as infinite reason, and whose final retribution for all human deeds should perpetually shield men against temptation and bind them to a docile and true-hearted obedience to all the known commands of the Great Maker and Father.—— Nor was this testimony of Israel's penitent king designed for the pleasure-seeking men of his time alone. It is a testimony for the ages that were to come after—the voice of a wisdom, if human, yet also more than human in that the Most High gave it his endorsement and sanction. It speaks to us of the nineteenth century—to men of all the centuries far down in time as the world shall be a snare to human souls—long as the young shall need the word—"Remember thy Creator *now*." The great apostolic injunction to *use the world as not abusing it*," stands forth here in greatly expanded form, enforced by a thousand proofs that such abuse is

only one intense and utter vanity, and regulated by the twofold consideration—on the one hand that all the real good of this world is the gift of God; and on the other, that he will surely hold every man to a righteous retribution in the final judgment for both his use and his abuse thereof. With surpassing pertinence and force this book closes, leaving the echo of this judgment trump still resounding in our ear. Ah, king Solomon! did the voice of that trump die away from thine ear in those guilty days of thine apostasy from the God of thy fathers? Even if so, it was only to make its echoes the more impressive when returning wisdom brought thy heart once more back to just thoughts of God and of duty. The words that come down to us wet with the tears of a penitent eye and fragrant with the odors of a penitent life are the very words for a generation of sinners to hear. *Let them sink deeply into our penitent hearts!*

# THE SONG OF SOLOMON.

## PREFACE.

HAVING commented upon the two other books of Solomon, I paused long at the threshold of this Song before I could decide whether to write upon this also, or pass it without remark. I could not doubt that it is an accredited portion of the inspired word, and therefore I felt unwilling to suggest any thing to its discredit, even by implication. To give reasons for passing it by would involve more or less discussion of the main questions at issue in the book. To pass it without remark could not be satisfactory to those who hold (rightly) that "all scripture" (*i. e.*, all the present Old Testament Canon) "is given by inspiration of God and is profitable." I also considered that some who read and love the Bible know not what to think of this book, and are therefore prepared to welcome any modest attempt to relieve their difficulties.

My own difficulties and doubts in respect to writing an exposition of this book have turned mainly on two points: (1.) Whether the scope and aim of the book admit of being satisfactorily determined. (2.) Whether a book so thoroughly oriental in its conceptions, its imagery and its taste, can be read and studied with profit in our times, by a people so unlike the orientals as we are in our sense of delicacy and propriety and in our poetic conceptions.

As to the first of these points, my views will appear in their place in the introduction below. I need only say here that, having commenced my special investigation with a strong leaning

toward the literal construction of the book as opposed to the figurative, I have been constrained to abandon that view and to embrace the opposite one by the force of considerations which seem to me to be at once so legitimate and so strong as to leave no room for serious doubt.——As to the second point, I have considered that one part of the commentator's work is to prepare an oriental book for occidental readers—a book written twenty-five centuries ago, in a state of society exceedingly unlike our own, for profitable use in our own times.

In some few passages the received English translation should be improved for the sake of greater delicacy. This may be done with no violation of the spirit of the original. I have therefore introduced a new translation.——Moreover, the book being mainly a dialogue in which the principal speakers are Solomon and his bride, I have indicated the passages spoken respectively by these two parties. This distinction is very obscure in the English translation, but is for the most part very obvious in the Hebrew because this language distinguishes the gender of the second person—the party *spoken to*—in both the pronoun and the verb. I have transferred the Hebrew names of the parties, *Shelomoh* (Solomon), and "*Shulamith*," his bride.

Some other points of a preliminary nature will appear in the Introduction.

I am happy to acknowledge my indebtedness to Prof. C. E. Stowe (Biblical Repository, April, 1847) and Rev. Leonard Withington's "Solomon's Song Translated and Explained."

Oberlin, Ohio, 1870.

# INTRODUCTION

WHATEVER may be true as to a secondary meaning, in its primary sense this book treats of love as between the sexes. It has been conceded generally, if not universally, and it must be, that the love portrayed here is connubial, or wedded love, *i. e.*, between parties sustaining the marriage relation, either prospectively by solemn betrothal, or actually, after marriage, and most probably the latter. The representation is in no respect that of illicit passion.——It is doubtless due to oriental taste that so much is said of personal attractions, and that such a standard of personal beauty is assumed. But there is no disputing over questions of taste. ["De gustibus," etc.] The love of beauty was in our common nature in paradise. Our Maker provided a large place for this element in our constitution, wisely designing it should conduce both to honorable marriage, and to its ministries of good to our race. ——It should be carefully noticed, moreover, that this book represents the parties as fascinated with each other's society and as mutually enjoying in a high degree the loveliness of spring, the fragrance of sweet odors, the charms of music, the beauty of flowers—in short all the joys of this fair world which blend so perfectly with pure and chaste love in human bosoms. A due regard to these features of the book ought to vindicate it from the aspersions sometimes thrown upon it, of having a lascivious and morally pernicious tendency.

In order to do justice to the author of this book and to those who

placed it in the sacred canon, more should be said of its style and taste than simply to call it oriental. Let us, then, examine this matter more thoroughly and ask how it came to pass that men of pure mind, living in the ancient East, could have tastes so unlike ours?——In answer, two facts have paramount influence. (1.) That general society was scarcely ever *mixed*. Outside the family circle the sexes rarely intermingled in society. To this day the wives and daughters of Western Asia are subjected to a rigid seclusion, and even espionage, which we should consider degrading, debasing, and intolerable. Now a little reflection will show that the laws of taste and propriety in regard to what shall be considered delicate are determined largely by the fact of mixed society. Many things are tolerated in the presence of only one sex, which would be deemed entirely inadmissible in the presence of both. ——(2.) A second fact pertains to different modes of dress. By the general law of language it is not indelicate to speak of those parts of the person which are usually exposed, uncovered, *e. g.*, the face, the eyes, the hair, the neck, the hands. If we see beauty in these exposed parts of the person we never think it a violation of delicacy to speak of it. Now the people of the ancient East wore less clothing than we do, and covered less of the person. Especially they did not cover the bosom, and hence spake naturally of this as one point of personal beauty, as we now sometimes hear of the fair and beautiful neck. I do not say this to defend their notions of taste, much less to recommend their adoption. Suffice it to give the facts as they are, and to say that we must not impute to them indelicacy of mind and impurity of heart because their tastes and standard of judgment differ from our own.—— I add further that in my view a fair translation of this book should aim to give its spirit rather than its precise letter; for obviously it should labor to make the book to us what it was to Solomon and his first readers—equally chaste and delicate in its allusions; equally far from liability to unhallowed associations.

The Scope of the Book.—From these preliminary remarks, I pass to the main question of exposition; viz.: *Is the book a mere delineation of human love; or is it an allegory, designed to represent the love of God to his covenant people?*

In the former case, the writer may be supposed to aim to recommend marriage; to present the attractions toward that high-

est state of earthly happiness; to bear his testimony to the purity of this relation, to its legitimate sympathy with whatever is beautiful in nature, to the pure and abiding pleasures of connubial society, and especially to the blessedness of monogamy as compared with polygamy—of living joyously with one wife as contrasted with living, as best one could, with many. These views of the writer's aim (I suggest) are supposable. Some very worthy critics have held them. They will claim our attention.

The other alternative I have termed an *allegory*, meaning by this a series of scenes and acts which have an ulterior aim, a half concealed significance—well known examples of which we have in Bunyan's "Christian Pilgrim" and in Hannah More's "Parley the Porter." The Bible also furnishes illlustrations of the spiritual allegory in both the Old Testament and the New. In the Old Testament see Isa. 5: 1–7, where the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel," and Ps. 80: 8–16 and Ps. 45; in the New, essentially the parables of our Lord. As already indicated, the book taken as an allegory represents the covenant relation between God and his people in which mutual love and fidelity are the central elements—God on his part ever loving and faithful toward his people; and his people on their part in duty bound and solemnly binding themselves to responsive love and eternal fidelity to their God.——Our choice must lie between these two alternatives. There can be no third.

The arguments germain to the question must come from the following sources:

1. Worthiness of aim, comparatively viewed.
2. Admissibility; *i. e.*, Is either theory ruled out as incompatible with the points made in the book?
3. The early traditional interpretation.
4. The allusions to the book in other books of the Bible, and the current use of its spiritual analogies.——These sources of evidence we must examine.

I. Worthiness of Aim, viewed comparatively.—This book stands in the sacred canon by indefeasible right, counted in among the sacred books by all the standard authorities; endorsed therefore by Christ and his apostles; and moreover, attributed to Solomon according to the unanimous consent of all sober critics.—— Now all other scripture has a high moral purpose—an obvious aim,

worthy of the source whence it came. The very idea of a revelation from God to man involves such an aim and purpose. Consequently, we are not only authorized but bound to look for such an aim in this book. If a choice lies between two constructions, otherwise possible, this consideration legitimately comes in with a strong, perhaps decisive bearing upon our choice.——Many things have been said against the literal construction of this book with which I can have no sympathy. The early Christian fathers sometimes seem to speak of connubial love, even the purest known to mortals, as necessarily involving more or less of original sin. Hence they denounce unsparingly any construction which finds such love in this song. Our age has advanced too far toward the Millenium to endorse such asceticism. I judge that in so far as this song commends conjugal fidelity; paints attractively the pure devotion of husband and wife to each other ["my beloved is mine and I am his"]; sets forth the beautiful blending of the love of nature and the charms of rural life with the social endearments of the connubial relation, it has done a noble work for the purity and elevation of our common humanity. The main question which presses upon my mind at this point is of this sort:—Under the literal construction of the book, do its subject and the manner of treating it correspond to the rest of the Bible? Is it in the same general sense *religious?* With our eye on the Bible as a whole, should we expect this subject, so presented, would find a place in it?

There is one special aspect of the literal construction which seems to me to stand, in point of worthiness of aim, quite above any other, viz., that which supposes the book to be a protest against polygamy and a purposed argument for monogamy—the original and perfect form of marriage between one man and one woman. This would be a high and worthy purpose, the more important in that age of debasing polygamy, and the more effective as coming from Solomon himself—a protest against the gigantic sins of his own life. As the book of Ecclesiastes stands before the ages his witness against the supreme pursuit of earthly pleasure in general, so this song might be supposed to stand in like manner as his protest against polygamy. If in its leading points the book would bear this construction, there would be no lack in it of worthy and high moral aim. Whether or not it will bear this construction will be considered under our next class of proofs.

No other modification of the literal sense seems to me to fill adequately the true idea of a worthy and high aim, judged of in the light of analogy with the purpose and aim of the other sacred books.

It deserves special attention here that this book stands before us with high claims—"The Song of Songs"—the superlative song of the holy Word. The nation already had in hand the song of Moses and Miriam at the Red Sea; the last song of Moses in review of God's paternal care of his chosen through their forty years of wandering; the Song of Deborah over the fall of Israel's foes; and many a song of "the sweet psalmist of Israel"—with all of which we may suppose this of Solomon to be tacitly compared as the song of all songs, inferior to none, if not eclipsing all. [If we suppose the point of comparison to be with the thousand and four others written by himself (1 Kings 4: 32), the argument is essentially the same.]——Shall we here assume the point of comparison and standard of value to be only that of poetic embellishment—artistic merit? Must we not assume a broader range of comparison so as to include as well the excellence of its theme and the high moral worthiness of its aim? If so, this consideration must have weight upon the question of its construction as literal or allegorical. If the allegorical construction be admissible and accepted, the book at once develops the noblest theme and the highest moral purpose. The love of God to his chosen redeemed people—a love so pure, so deep, so true, so rich in its fruits of blessing so fraught with reacting influence toward reciprocal love in return—what can be a more worthy theme for poetry and song? What truth ever revealed from God to man should more command our grateful reception and our profound regard?

II. We are next to consider the point of *admissibility;* for it is certainly supposable that one or the other of these theories can not be carried out in view of the points made in the book. I think this must be said of the literal construction. It encounters stubborn and in my view insurmountable difficulties. Thus:

1. The one wife is shown to be, not one but many. She says (1: 4) "Draw *me; we* will run after thee. The king hath brought *me* into his chambers; *we* will be glad and rejoice in thee; *we* will remember thy love more than wine." Here the "*me*" is what is called a collective, or a noun [pronoun] of multitude; not

one bride only, but many. The speaker is a representative personage. The church of God considered allegorically might fitly say this; but no one only wife would say this or could.

2. In this same connection and verse the allegorical sense is plainly indicated in another expression: "The upright love thee." In the allegorical sense all the morally good will love God. The language is (to say the least) far less pertinent considered as coming from the lips of a literal bride, for intense connubial love is wont to be jealous of rivals—exclusive in its claims.

3. The facts of the case rule out the best form of the literal sense, viz.: that the author devotes his book to the praises of monogamy as opposed to polygamy; for this bride is not the only one; there are at least sixty more, besides four-score concubines (6: 8). The king does indeed give this one the preference, and says that the other queens and concubines praised her (v. 9). But this point in the story effectually spoils the theory of a panegyric on the blessedness of having one wife as compared with the curse of having many.

4. As here represented, the bride in this book is not an Israelite but a foreigner, for she comes from a more southern clime, apparently the daughter of some Arab sheik, dark-skinned as the tents of her own Kedar (1: 5, 6); the bridal procession comes up from this southern wilderness (3: 6 and 8: 5); the daughters of Jerusalem are envious of her as an alien of another race (1: 5 and 2: 7 and 3: 5, 11 and 5: 8). Consequently, under the literal construction, this book is *Solomon's defense before the people of Israel and especially before the jealous damsels of Jerusalem for marrying a heathen wife!* Moreover, the defense is put on the ground of her personal beauty—of his passion for her and of hers for him. Now, considering that this is an attempted justification of what was a crime under the divine law (Ex. 34: 16 and Deut. 7: 3 and 17: 17), how can this construction be adopted? How can we suppose that Solomon wrote this book by divine inspiration for such a purpose, and that inspired men gave it a place in the sacred canon with this view of its scope and bearing?——On the other theory the bearing of these features of the case, considered as the historic basis for an allegory, will be considered in its place.

5. Understood literally, many of the prominent facts recorded of the life of this bride are scarcely supposable; *e. g.*, that she

spends so much of her time in the care of her flocks, in shepherd life in her native desert; and that her husband puts her to this business (1 : 8); that on at least two different occasions while temporarily in Jerusalem, she roams about the city in the dead of night in search of her lost husband; and, worse still, is in one of these cases (5 : 7) insulted and roughly treated by the city watchmen. Can this be a scene in the actual life of Solomon's favorite queen?

6. The passage (5 : 1) certainly seems to speak, under the image of a feast, of the pleasures incident to the marriage relation. "A garden enclosed is my spouse—a fountain sealed" [a chaste and faithful wife.] "I am come into my garden, my spouse," says the king; "I have drunk my wine and my milk," etc., and then, most remarkably, he adds: "Eat, O friends," etc. But Solomon surely understood the incongruity of this when said of the marriage relation. [Compare Prov. 5 : 17.]

7. I must concede some force to the objection that literally considered Solomon could not with propriety speak in such exalted terms of himself as he does in this book (*e. g.*, in 5 : 10–16). But if we suppose him here to speak of the virtues and glories of the Great Celestial Bridegroom, all is right.

These considerations seem to me effectually to preclude the literal construction and shut us up logically to the allegorical.

III. A third source of testimony lies in the early traditional interpretation of this book.

1. There is in my view a strong probability that those who introduced this book into the sacred canon held its allegorical interpretation, since I can scarcely suppose that otherwise they would have given it a place there. Their views if known on unquestionable authority would of course be decisive, both on the score of their own personal inspiration and divine guidance (points which I feel constrained to assume), and on the score of their traditional knowledge coming down from the author of the song.

2. It is a point of perhaps some importance that, according to Josephus, the compilers classed this book, not in the Hagiographa, *i. e.*, with Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, but with the *Prophets*. This fact seems to intimate that they gave the book a prophetic significance, which of course must imply its allegorical construction.

3. The testimony of the Chaldee paraphrast is full and clear to

this point. He calls it, "The songs and hymns which *Solomon the prophet*, the king of Israel, uttered in the spirit of prophecy before the Lord."——It will be seen that the value of this testimony turns very much upon its antiquity. Unfortunately this point remains in some doubt. In its written form, this Targum [Chaldee paraphrase] must be placed *after* the Talmud, for it contains allusions to it. [This Talmud is dated at different periods from the second to the fourth century of the Christian era.] Some of the Targums were written out much earlier—that of Jonathan Ben Uzziel on the Prophets, shortly before the Christian era, and that of Onkelos on the Pentateuch, shortly after; but this on the Songs is put by some as late as the sixth century [Kitto]. But in its oral form it existed several centuries earlier, the demand for such translations from the original Hebrew into a dialect of the Chaldee having sprung up in the age of Ezra and Nehemiah among the exiles returned from Babylon. (Neh. 8: 2, 3, 7, 8.) We must dismiss the testimony of the Chaldee paraphrast with the remark that he is abundantly explicit and positive in his statements—all we could ask, if only he were ancient and therefore competent to give the views of the author, or even of the compilers.——The same may be said of all the Jewish authorities from the Christian era to the age of the Reformation. This voice is one, wholly in favor of the allegorical sense.——So of the early Christian fathers. They all held the allegorical sense, following Origen of whose commentary on this song Jerome quaintly says, that whereas in his other commentaries he easily surpassed all his competitors, in this he surpassed himself. They all speak on this point with no misgivings of doubt. They repelled the literal sense with indignation and abhorrence.——It would avail little for me to expatiate upon the value of their testimony. I need only say that while I am constrained to attach some importance to it, I can by no means regard it as decisive.

IV. Much more important in my view is the testimony obtained from analogous imagery in other scriptures and from probable allusions made in other sacred writers to this book.——The nature of this argument will be readily understood. If it shall appear that before this book was written, we find few if any clear cases of the use of human marriage to represent God's relation to his people, but that after its appearance, this imagery became exceedingly com-

mon, we may reasonably infer—(1.) That this sort of imagery was congenial to the Hebrew taste, and therefore with great probability obtains in this song; and, (2.) That with like probability this song was the special occasion of introducing and giving currency to this imagery; and therefore it must have been interpreted in this figurative way. Yet farther, if unmistakable allusions to this book appear in other scriptures, in which allusions the figurative allegorical sense is certain, then the proof that these other sacred writers accepted this song in an allegorical sense can not well be gainsayed.——Taking up these several points in their order, we may notice that in the first public covenant formally made between God and the Hebrew people (Ex. 19: 5-8), there is no allusion to the figure of marriage. The only supposed allusions, prior to the writing of this song, are in the word "jealous" ["for I am a jealous God," Ex. 20: 5, etc.], and in the phrase—"go a whoring after other gods" (Ex. 34: 15, 16 and Lev. 20: 5, 6 and 17: 7 and Num. 14: 33 and Judg. 2: 17). But very soon after the appearance of this song, the use of this figure of marriage to express God's relation to his covenant people became exceedingly frequent. We have it in very strong form in Hosea, chapters 1–3; also in Isa. 1: 21 and 50: 1 and 54: 5, 6 and 62: 4, 5 and Jer. 2: 22 and 3: 1–4 and 31: 22 and Ezek. 16 and 23, and in expressions as follows: "The land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the Lord." "For she is not my wife, neither am I her husband; let her therefore put away her whoredoms out of her sight" etc. "How is the faithful city become a harlot?" "Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement whom I have put away?" "For thy Maker is thine Husband." "Remember then, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals when thou wentest after me in the wilderness," etc.——The same figure passes over into the New Testament and appears in Matt. 9: 15 and 22: 2–10 and Jn. 3: 29 and Rom. 7: 4 and 2 Cor. 11: 2 and Eph. 5: 25–32 and Rev. 19: 7–9 and 21: 2 and 22: 17, thus: "Jesus said to them, Can the children of the bride-chamber mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?" "But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken from them and then shall they fast." "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom," etc. "Ye are become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead." "I am jealous over you with godly jealousy, for I have espoused you to one husband that I may present

you as a chaste virgin to Christ." "The marriage of the Lamb is come and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousness of *saints*." "The Spirit and the bride say come," etc.

Reserving Ps. 45 for future consideration, we may notice that these allusions are very common in the prophets, and not least in those who stand nearest to the age of this Song, indicating that this figurative conception became current, may we not say *national*—familiar to every Israelite, *as if* it had been impressed upon the national mind by some such influence as that of this book by Solomon. It may at least be said that the free use of this figure by the prophets is a fact that this Song of Solomon, taken in a figurative sense, will readily account for. It may also be safely affirmed that this current usage most abundantly proves that there was nothing in this conception distasteful to the Hebrew mind—nothing uncongenial to their national character; whence it becomes at least probable that the figurative sense of this book is the true one. ——Our argument becomes far more positive and decisive when we come to the point of *definite allusions in subsequent writers to this Song*, of a sort which assumes its allegorical sense. Here special notice must be taken of Ps. 45. This Psalm seems to have been built upon the Song of Solomon. It certainly contains a number of similar forms of expression which have altogether the appearance of being definite allusions. Thus in the caption of the Psalm, "Upon Shoshannim," *i. e.*, concerning lilies—the symbol of beautiful women. Now this is the very word used repeatedly in this as well as in its primary sense in the Song (2: 1, 2, 16 and 4: 5 and 5: 13 and 6: 2, 3 and 7: 2).——Further the caption adds, "*A song of the loved ones*," which also is a precise description of the Song of Solomon. Again, the subject of the Psalm is declared to be "touching the king" (vs. 1, 5, 11, 13–15), to which point the Song of Solomon corresponds perfectly as may be seen in 1: 4, 12 and 7: 5.——This king (in the psalm) receives the highest possible commendation for his beauty; v. 2, "Thou art fairer than the children of men"—which only reproduces the whole scope of the Song, *e. g.*, 5: 10. "My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand."——A special point is made of "grace of lips"—useful and attractive speech. The phrase in the Psalm is, "Grace is poured into thy lips" (v. 2): in

the Song—"His lips like lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh: his mouth is most sweet, yea, he is altogether lovely" (5: 13, 16). Again, the reference (Ps. 45: 7) to this king's companions ["fellows"] gives us in the Hebrew the same word which occurs twice in the Song (1: 7 and 8: 13). "The flocks of thy companions;" "the companions hearken to thy voice."——The bridal procession is prominent in both the Song (3: 6–11, and the Psalm (vs. 14, 15). The Queen is adorned with surpassing splendor in the Psalm (v. 9): "Upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir." "The King's daughter is all glorious within" (v. 13). The entire strain of the Song is the same, *e. g.*, 4: 9–11, with all which may be compared Rev. 19: 7, 8—"His wife hath made herself ready;" "arrayed in fine linen, clean and white."——A very specific point is the mention in both of "myrrh and aloes;" in the Psalm v. 8; in the Song, 4: 14—a combination found nowhere else in the Bible.—— Resemblances so numerous, so apparently undesigned, and at once so general, covering the scope and drift of each composition, and yet so minute, reaching to the definite points of costume and drapery, seem to justify us fully in the conclusion that the Psalm is precisely the Song over again—the Song condensed, simplified, its religious significance and practical bearings brought out more distinctly, and the whole adapted to public worship in the sanctuary—set to music. There can not be the least doubt in regard to the allegorical sense of the Psalm. If it appears beyond reasonable question that the Psalm is built upon the Song and is only a condensation of it, modifying and reproducing for the special purposes of sacred worship, then the Song must have been understood in the same allegorical sense as the Psalm.—— Several other allusions to this Song of Solomon appear in the sacred writers; *e. g.*, in Isa. 5: 1: "Now will I sing to my well beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard." The terms, "beloved," a "song," his "vineyard," all seem to be borrowed from this Song. So when Paul says (Eph. 5: 27) that Christ loved the church and gave himself for it that he might present it to himself *without spot* or wrinkle or any such thing, the attentive reader of this song would discern the allusion—"Thou art all fair, my love, there is no *spot* in thee." Naturally we may suppose that Paul had his eye on this book when he said (2 Cor. 11: 2), "I am jealous over you with godly jealousy, for I have espoused you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste

virgin to Christ." And to name no more, the revelator John also, when he wrote—"The marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready." "And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white."——It should not be forgotton that this Song of Solomon was in the Jewish sacred scriptures—was therefore in the hands of the sons of Asaph (the writers of Ps. 45), of Hosea, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Paul and John; and further, was not only in their hands but was with them a *classic*, a book to be read and read again; read and admired; read till its leading terms and catch-words (so to speak) became familiar, and therefore found place in their current thought and utterance whenever they touch upon kindred themes. Hence the readiness and ease of these allusions to its leading thoughts and expressions; hence perhaps (let me suggest) the reason why their references to this Song take this form of passing allusion and the current use of its imagery and catch-words instead of distinct and formal quotation. It has been often urged against the figurative sense that no sacred writer—certainly no New Testament writer—has quoted from it. If my suggestion is pertinent, it more than obviates this objection, for an easy and ready use of its imagery and of its leading terms and phrases is a more decisive attestation than a formal quotation would be, for it proves both a more familiar acquaintance and a higher appreciation.

I have thus sought to open and to examine briefly, yet by no means exhaustively, these four sources of evidence from which the proofs in my view must be drawn for the decision of this great question between the literal and the allegorical sense of the book.

I pass now to notice somewhat more fully the principal objections to the allegorical sense, viz.:

I. That there is nothing in the book to indicate an allegory—nothing that gives us clearly its spiritual intent and bearing. It is said that wherever else the Scriptures speak of God's relation to his people as being that of the husband to the wife, they make this spiritual use of the figure perfectly plain, and then it is asked: If this song be a case of the same sort, why is not *its* meaning made equally clear and certain?

In reply I have to say that this objection for a long time seemed to me to have great force and inclined me to the literal construction. More extended investigation has suggested to me the following points of reply, which seem at least to abate, if not even to

nullify, its force. (1.) In the ancient East it was the custom during the seven days nuptial feast for the bridegroom (if equal to it) to put forth riddles (Judg. 14: 12–14)—something of the enigmatical sort, to quicken the social life and exercise the wits of the party. This song partakes of this character, conforms itself (we may say) to the usage current in those times in respect to nuptial songs. Can any good reason be assigned why, being written primarily for his own times, and for a people, therefore, accustomed to this style of nuptial song, it should not appear in a form that would somewhat task the ingenuity of the reader to fathom its real significance?——(2.) I have said above, "if equal to it." Now Solomon, of all the men that ever lived, *was equal* to it. May we not say that he prided himself upon his unrivaled sagacity, his keeness of intellectual apprehension, his surpassing in wisdom all the kings and queens of the earth when they came to his court "to prove him with hard questions" (1 Kings 10: 1–3)? To which I may add as germain to this point that a large portion of the proverbs from his pen have this same enigmatic quality—a spice of the riddle—a deeper sense than lies upon the surface. That is, *Solomon had accustomed himself to write in this way.* He had a taste for it and had decided convictions of its value. Is it not, therefore, entirely appropriate that this fact should have weight in our construction of this "song," and that it should go to obviate the objection now in hand?——(3.) Lest some of my readers should assume that this way of writing with a recondite half-concealed significance does not befit the sacredness and solemnity of a revelation from God to man, I must briefly suggest that the parables of our Lord are constructed on this very principle and involve this same recondite significance which you must needs study and search out diligently if you would reach their true meaning and full force.——(4.) The objection draws a comparison between this long and very much expanded composition on the one hand, and on the other the much shorter ones, like Ps. 45 or Isa. 5: 1–8, or the still more brief use of this figure in the writings of Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel; and argues that since these more brief compositions or allusions indicate very decisively their allegorical sense, so the much longer one of this song ought to do. To which the proper reply is that the longer the allegory the less need is there that it should explain its own meaning in literal terms. The greater the number of circumstantial points given in the alle-

gory, the more material you have for evolving of yourself the true significance. John Bunyan made a whole book out of his story of Christian, the pilgrim. Having interwoven throughout the whole story numerous points, features, and circumstances that can have their proper construction on no other theory than that of the allegory, delineating the life-experiences of a pilgrim Christian, no special explanation was necessary.——(5.) The allegory usually makes the names given to its prominent characters significant. Bunyan more than half disclosed the meaning of his allegory when he gave his hero the name Christian, and his wife the name Christiana. Hannah More gave a clew under the name "Parley the Porter," to the case of one who *parleys* with the tempter and is remiss in his watch at the gate of the castle as the responsible "*porter*" never should be. So in this song, the names of the two leading personages are specially significant. The name Solomon (Heb. Shelomoh) means the peaceful one—the Prince of peace. (It occurs in the song, in 1: 1 and 3: 11 and 8: 11, 12.) Whoever will carefully read Ps. 72, considered as written either by Solomon himself or by his father *for* him, and bearing in mind this significance of his name, will see that the very name had an outlook toward the person and work of the Great Messiah. This view will be very much confirmed if we consider the promise made to David (2 Sam. 7: 12–17, 19, 29) of a royal son whose rule should be universal, his influence most blessed, and his sway eternal—a son, not Solomon himself, but one like him in certain points yet indefinitely greater. Hence Solomon's use of his own name in this song may certainly be supposed to look toward the typical (shall we call it?) or rather the prophetical use of his own name. ——This becomes far more obvious when we pass from the name of Solomon to that of his bride. Considering that this bride is from another nation and tribe, it seems to me beyond question that the name she bears in this book is not her own original and proper name, but is given her to indicate the sense of the allegory. It is Shulamith (twice occurring) (6: 13), which is probably the Hebrew feminine of Shelomoh (Solomon). That is, this female personage is *Mrs. Solomon*. If he is the Prince of peace she is the Princess of peace. If his name bears in it a prophetic outlook toward the great Messiah, so does hers toward the bride of the Messiah, the Lamb's wife.——(6.) The song contains other indications of its allegorical character, partly in points that are incom-

patible with the literal sense, as above considered; and partly in more direct allusions to its true significance, *e. g.*, in 1: 4, "The upright love thee."

II. A second objection often urged is that the New Testament writers make no quotations from this book, but would have done so if they had accepted its allegorical sense.——I am free to admit that the apostles might have quoted from this book in a way which probably would have satisfied some who are not convinced by the endorsement they have in fact given. Why they did not give some explicit declaration to decide this vexed question, they have not told us. But we may say, (1.) That they do make very free use of the figure which underlies the allegorical construction of this song; and (2.) That they make some quite obvious allusions to its prominent points, as has been already shown. These allusions, so far forth as they can be identified and traced to this book, are thoroughly in point to prove its acceptance by the apostles as a spiritual allegory.

III. It has been sometimes objected that the spiritual sense implies a higher type of spirituality in the author than Solomon seems to have had; while the literal sense is quite in harmony with his taking to himself seven hundred wives.——But this objection overlooks several facts, *e. g.*, that the book bears internal evidence of having been written in his youth and not in his advanced age; that in youth his piety seems to have been eminently exemplary and for aught that appears truly spiritual, judging from his choice of wisdom before all other good; from the zeal with which he devoted himself to the building of the temple; from the striking pertinence, simplicity, and spirituality of his prayer at its dedication; and if he wrote Ps. 72, as is generally supposed, then we have in that psalm another index of enlarged and just spiritual views of vital truth. Such a degree of piety as was a prerequisite to the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, he must have had, for the fact of his real inspiration as a writer of the Divine Word can by no means be denied.

IV. It has been objected to this book that the sentiments and emotions of connubial love can not be safely transferred into our devotional feelings toward God or the Lord Jesus Christ, and that the study of this song as an allegory naturally leads to such a transfer and is therefore dangerous.——Some degree of danger in this direction to a certain class of minds probably exists. Hence

the importance of noting carefully that *neither this allegory nor any other is intended to apply in all possible points.*——(1.) Of course the sexual relation is ruled out utterly and absolutely.——(2.) It does not involve any such equality between the respective parties, God and his church, as exists in the marriage relation between bridegroom and bride. The latter relation is between parties belonging to the same order of existence, of the same race perhaps, the same nationality, the same grade of intellectual and social culture—in a word, the same grade of substantial worth. But in all these points, how utterly unlike are God and his covenant people! How exalted is He in the great scale of being high above all human thought! How measureless are his dignity and worth! The marvel of all marvels is that this great God should ever represent himself as the Husband of his people! That he should stoop so low—should come down to assume such relations to beings so insignificant, so weak, and more than all else, so vile and unworthy!——In this point of light—the true one—it becomes unutterably revolting to think that the unworthy recipients of such royal favor should abuse it to purposes of vain pride!——(3.) If any Christian should press this allegory in a way and to the extent of assuming himself to be the special favorite of the Most High and worthy to engross and appropriate his bridal affection—a feeling neither unusual nor culpable in the merely human relation—he would most egregriously abuse it. Perhaps it was to guard against this and kindred abuses that the Scriptures never employ this allegory with reference to the individual Christian, but only with reference to the church as a whole. Such seems to be the fact. In this song the bride represents a plurality of persons: "Draw *me; we* will run after thee." It is to the ideal Zion that the Lord says through Isaiah, "Thy Maker is thy Husband," and Paul speaks "concerning Christ *and the church*" when he alludes to this great mystery, exhorting husbands to love their wives even as Christ loved *the church* and gave himself for it that he might sanctify and cleanse it to become spotless and meet to be presented to himself as his heavenly bride. All notions therefore of a very special exclusive favoritism must be promptly ruled out and utterly discarded. Let us not abuse this precious book. What could be more sad than to convert one of our most precious blessings into a rank and withering curse!——These are the prominent objections to the allegorical sense.

It is pertinent now to inquire what principles shall guide the Christian reader in his study of this book, and what points of practical instruction will he find here?

It should never be forgotten that the book is an allegory, and consequently that the laws of interpretation that govern the allegory should apply here. The allegory is a very extended figure of speech—one great figurative conception running through the whole production. The most common abuse is to try to make the allegory teach too many things, by making every minute feature in the costume and drapery teach its own separate truth. In this song, if the reader should assume a special spiritual sense in every article of dress, in every allusion to fruit or flower or fragrance, to hill or vale, to animals, foxes, roes, hinds of the field—he would doubtless make the book very ridiculous. Such fancy-work is utterly out of place. What has man to do to foist his fancies into God's revealed word and claim for them the authority of divine inspiration?——The only sensible way to treat an allegory is to look with the utmost diligence for the great central idea, and then to assume that the allegory was designed to illustrate, embellish, and enforce this one leading, governing idea, and no other. All the minor points are subservient to this and take their places under it in close and dependent relation.

In this song taken allegorically, the great central idea is that the relation of God to his people in covenant with himself is analogous to the well-known marriage relation in human society.——It has already been said that in this allegory the bride is not precisely the individual Christian, but the church as a whole. It seems to me the part of wisdom to give scope to this fact so far forth as to guard us against the abuses above indicated, but *not so far* as to rob the book of its precious applications to the heart and life of the individual Christian. For it must be true that in loving the church, God loves the individual Christian souls that compose it. In all the condescensions, compassions, tendernesses, fidelities of his connubial love, his heart rests on the individuals that make up the church rather than strictly upon the church itself as an abstract ideality.

Guided by these principles we shall learn from this allegorical song,——1. That the love between God and his people should be *reciprocal.* In the marriage covenant each party professes and binds itself to love the other. A sense of love received should

prompt to responsive love in return. So a sense of God's love to us should quicken and intensify our love to him.

2. In all true marriage it is assumed that this mutual love of the parties is and should be exceedingly strong. One of the first lessons taught us in this song is the *strength* of the love which God bears toward his people. The figure seized upon as the basis of this allegory indicates and signifies the deepest, strongest love known to human souls. The loving man and the loving woman are happy to leave father and mother, brother and sister, and be no longer twain, but *one*. Human bosoms can witness to no love more deep, more pure, more self-sacrificing than this. This is a simple fact of human experience which it were quite gratuitous to attempt to prove. The proof is in the hearts of those who have experienced its presence and its power.——Now when God takes up this well-known human affection as he does often in his word, and by allegory as I believe in this song, and affirms it of himself toward his people, he testifies most explicitly and forcibly to the deep, intense, absorbing love of his heart toward his people. Then let a sense of this great love toward us quicken and call forth a like deep, intense, and all-absorbing love from our hearts toward him. Why not? Would it not be an outrage against all propriety and all obligation to withhold it?

3. That it involves on God's part extreme and wondrous condescension.——The mightiest and proudest of earthly monarchs might descend to the meanest hovel in his realm and take thence a maiden for his royal queen; yet this would only begin to indicate the sort of condescension we now speak of; it could scarcely be deemed a unit of measurement by which to estimate it. We have no line to measure the height of God's majesty above our insignificance—the glory of his nature above the baseness of ours. O, who can think that one so pure, so great, so glorious, should condescend to assume the most endearing relations of love toward beings like ourselves! We can give no reason for it save to say it comes of his pure and exhaustless benevolence, taking the form of compassion for the self-ruined—the otherwise hopelessly lost. O what inspirations toward responsive love and eternal gratitude should come to us from God's amazing condescension and unutterable love!

4. That whereas this relation began on the part of God in his love in the sense of benevolence, it proceeds to seek most assidu-

ously and earnestly to lay the foundation in our character for the love of complacency. In other words, it labors to make us *loveable*—to create in us those qualities of character upon which even the pure and Holy One can look with approbation. God comes into these most endearing relations to us in order to reproduce in our souls his own lost image of purity—his own self-sacrificing benevolence. For this end he shapes the discipline of his chastisements to "make us partakers of his own holiness" (Heb. 12: 10). For this he gives us his Spirit to change us into the same image from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3: 18)—to sprinkle clean water upon us that we may be clean from all our filthiness and idols (Ezek. 36: 25).——Now to know that our Maker in the capacity of "Husband" (Isa. 54: 5) labors with us and in us to such an end, for such a purpose—how should it set our souls on fire with unutterable longings and endeavors to realize in our Christian development this high ideal of love and purity like that of God!

5. That as the relation involves on God's part the most perfect fidelity—a steadfast, unfaltering love, forever true to his own covenant; so does it demand nothing less on our part—even a perfect chastity, the supreme and most devoted love and homage of our heart and of our life. O how should our hearts say with Ephraim of old (Hos. 14: 8), "What have I to do any more with idols?" How should we be jealous over our souls with godly jealousy lest any lower love should come in to supplant in the least possible measure the higher and purer love that is forever due to God alone!

6. As in the relation of husband and wife, little services, perpetually recurring, are the life of love, so the perpetual cares and services of our great Maker and Husband toward his people and in truth toward every individual soul, should hold us to perpetual service for him—a service done in love, done as the spontaneous expression of our love for him—a service that our love should be too strong to suffer us ever to neglect. O how should the reciprocity of this loving service on our part toward God be assiduously cherished! It is beautiful as between husband and wife—as between our divine Lord and his affianced people, it is glorious. How full of joy does the most laborious and self-sacrificing service toward God become when done in love, responsive to the love that glows in all the service he does for us!

7. As this song particularly indicates that this sweet relationship of love is liable to be interrupted and disturbed, and its bright-

ness beclouded by remissness on the part of the bride, let us take this purposed warning. Perhaps it will be to none of us untimely. Putting the whole force of this suggestion into one word, it would say to every one and to all, *Watch!*

8. The allegory implies that God confers great honor upon his people when he takes them into this relation to himself.——One of the greatest of earthly kings finds a humble maiden in the southern land and manifests for her the most tender affection. She is raised thereby to a place of highest honor. But on this point of the analogy it is but little that we can say now—nothing indeed beyond what John has said (1 Jn. 3 : 2): "It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him." But even so much should beget in us perpetual endeavors to prove ourselves worthy, at least to the extent of unswerving and unceasing fidelity.

9. And finally, as our divine Father has seen fit to set forth his love for his people and his claims upon their love, under this most precious relation, so fraught with suggestive analogies, so richly instructive, and withal, so intensely quickening and inspiring, let us guard most sedulously against abusing it; let us shut off sternly every unhallowed association which may steal upon us from the peculiar form of these representations, that so, holding our minds to the manifest intent of the allegory, we may bring home to our heart all the gloriously impulsive, quickening, heavenly inspirations to love and duty which it may and should impart.

If we may assume for this allegory an actually historic basis instead of a purely ideal one, we may think of Solomon as making affinity with some Arab chief in the land of the South and taking his daughter to wife. In fact he seems to have entered into many such matrimonial alliances as a measure of state policy, to cement fraternal bonds; to promote commerce and international friendship. It is not necessary that we should justify this policy as right and in harmony with the Mosaic law. Suffice it that the object seemed to Solomon important, so that his motives may not have been of the worst sort.——In its allegorical bearings this foreign bride may have foreshadowed the already predicted introduction of Gentile nations to constitute the great mass of the living church of Immanuel.

# THE SONG OF SOLOMON.

## CHAPTER I.

The title and the author having been given briefly, the song opens with its great central thought—the ideal Zion declaring her love for her divine Lord, and giving utterance to her longings for the manifestations of his love in return. We have her words in vs. 2–7; the first response of her Lord and King in vs. 8–11; then she resumes in vs. 12–14. V. 15 is from the bridegroom, and vs. 16, 17 from the bride.

1. The Song of songs, which is Solomon's.

All that need be said as to the title and the author has had its proper place in the introduction.

*Shulamith speaks.*

2. Let him greet me with affectionate salutations; his love is better than wine. 3. Thy perfumes are precious; thy name is fragrant with sweet odors effused; therefore the virgins love thee.

The change of person from "his" to "thy" is too common in Hebrew to need remark.——The word which I have translated "effused," Fuerst makes a proper noun:—"Thy name is as the oil of *Turak*." This construction relieves the discordance of gender, but labors under the objection that no such place is known. The proposed change does not affect the general sense of the passage. ——According to the sentiments of that age, wine and the fragrance of sweet spices filled their highest ideal of things delightful. We need not wonder therefore that the charms of the beloved one were set forth in such terms in a nuptial song. Translating them into the language of the Christian heart, we might put it thus: "O for some manifestations of my Savior's presence and love! His work meets every want of my nature and of my case as a lost soul. His name therefore embodies every excellence; his

favor is more to me than all the universe beside. Give me the witness of his love, and take away all else you will, yet I am more than blessed. Or to borrow the pertinent and exquisite lines of Dr. Withington, given (p. 233), to show how these sentiments might appear in a modern dress:

"From all the enchantments of time,
Where bitterness waits on desire,
Where pleasure is blended with crime,
And love is a vanishing fire—
I turn to the Bridegroom above,
Whose looks can such sweetness impart,
Whose kiss can our passions improve,
Because it encounters the heart.

"I am weary with phantoms that fade—
They cause me to weep and repine;
I would be in his garments arrayed
Whose love is much better than wine.
When the heart from its idols is loosed,
And the soul for its tenant makes room,
Then his name is like ointment effused,
Affording the richest perfume."

4. Draw me; we will run after thee. The king has brought me into his pavilion; let us rejoice and delight in thee; let us praise thy love more than wine. The good must always love thee.

As already said in the introduction, the speaker here is obviously not one individual and certainly not one only bride, but an ideal bride, representing many individuals—fitly speaking, therefore, sometimes in the singular and sometimes in the plural. Zion speaks for herself as one, or for all her sons and daughters as individuals, alternating from the one method to the other at her will and her taste. Thus by its obvious plurality of persons, this verse bears with great force against the literal and in favor of the allegorical construction of the whole book.——It involves also another point bearing in the same direction and with no less force, viz., the pertinence and fitness of the main idea—"Draw me; so will we run after thee." It will be seen that this is *prayer*. Considered as prayer, it implies conscious weakness and a sense of dependence for help. Now the thing to be noted is that this is precisely Christian experience. Every really Christian heart cries out to God, saying, Draw me more and more into a deeper, purer love; apply to my soul the strong attractions of thine own love, by the power of thine own divine Spirit;—then I may safely promise that I will run after thee. But with all my love, I am so conscious of personal weakness, I have so much reason to distrust myself if left one moment upon my own resolutions, even the best and holiest of them, I must implore thee never to leave me without thine own perpetual drawing. It is safe to say that this prayerful, trustful cry for help is the very breath of the Christian soul. No words could put it more perfectly.——But suppose these words applied

to the case of the human bride and her husband. We will suppose her to say—My dear husband, my heart is weak and treacherous; I am but too conscious of a very unsteady and unreliable love for you; I therefore beg you to throw around me all possible attractions to draw my heart; else how can I be sure of a cheerful and steady affection for you?——Now is this the usual tone of bridal love? Do the generations of human brides from loving Eve downward agree that this is a true copy of their hearts' experience? Do the happy husbands of earth all along the ages bear their united witness that they hear such prayers and such confessions? If they should, would not some of them be strongly tempted to respond—You may as well confess that you have no real love for me at all?——Here my argument is that the language is a perfect expression of Christian experience toward God, endorsed by all Christian hearts; but that taken as the utterance of woman's connubial love, its assumptions are slanderous, its prayer finds no echo in their experience. Therefore Solomon could never have put these words into the mouth of a bride to be spoken in their literal sense and application.——Much the same argument might be made upon the fitness of the promise—"We will run after thee." Husband and wife walk hand in hand, arm in arm. The picture of one running behind and after the other is uncivilized, not to say monstrous. But when the voice of Christian devotion testifies—"My soul followeth hard after God," we feel its propriety; we welcome it into our experience.

5. I am dark, but fair, ye daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon. 6. Eye me not with scorn because I am dark, because the southern sun has looked down upon me. My mother's sons were offended with me and set me to keep the vineyard; my own vineyard I have not kept.

The historical basis for this allegory which supposes the bride to have been the daughter of some Arab chieftain of a more southern clime and of a people subsisting upon their flocks and vineyards, serves to explain some of these allusions, but leaves some unexplained. The scenes are too remote, and perhaps, we must say, the enigma too deep for us to decipher the whole. We can understand why the jealous damsels of Jerusalem should look with no very pleasant feelings upon this royal stranger; but we have no clew to the unpleasant feeling toward her among her own mother's sons; and it is vain for us to inquire.——She seems to account for her dark complexion by her peculiar exposure in this out-of-door service in the vineyards. Her own vineyard [personal beauty] she had not been able to care for as she would.——The spiritual application of these minute particulars must in my view be fanciful, hazardous, and therefore unprofitable.

7. Tell me, thou beloved of my soul, where thou feedest

thy flock and where thou takest thy noon-tide repose; for why should I be as one vailed among the flocks of thy companions?

Both alike are thought of here as amid the scenes of shepherd life. She longs for the presence and society of her beloved, and begs to know where she may find him, especially in his hours of leisure and rest in the heat of the day.——It is generally agreed among the best commentators that the last clause of the verse should be translated, "Why should I be as a *vailed one*," and that the sense is, as a harlot, a woman of suspicious if not even of positively bad character. (Compare Gen. 38: 14, 15.) She could not endure to be at large among the flocks of other shepherds when her appropriate place and the home of her heart were with him whom her soul loved.——It scarcely need be said that Christian feeling has its corresponding phases—"O that I knew where I might find him!" Why should I suffer my heart to be afar from thee, in dangerous contact with other loves?

*Shelomoh replies.*

8. If thou knowest not, O thou fairest of women, go forth at the footsteps of the flock and feed thy kids by the tents of the shepherds.

The spirit of this seems to be—You will find the presence and the love you seek, *in the way of duty.* "Feed my sheep;" "feed my lambs;" so shall the chief shepherd delight in thee and reveal his presence to thy longing heart.

9. To my chariot horse of Pharaoh do I compare thee, my love. 10. Most fair are thy cheeks amid pendant chains—thy neck with gems. 11. Chains of gold have we made for thee with studs of silver.

Thus the king expresses his admiration of her beauty.——Solomon imported his chariot horses from Egypt, models of beauty in form and of grace in motion.——It is noticeable that the king himself provides for his bride the richest ornaments of gold and silver to set off her personal beauty. The corresponding spiritual facts are obvious. "By the grace of God, I am what I am."

*Shulamith responds.*

12. While the king sits upon his divan, my spikenard diffuses its sweet odors. 13. As a bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me, to be worn for its fragrance upon my bosom. 14. A cluster of fragrant white flowers [cyprus] is my beloved to me in the vineyards of Engedi.

Her admiration and affection find expression in terms borrowed from the sweet odors and lovely flowers of her native clime.——In

v. 13 her thought is unexceptionably pure and fine. Her beloved is a bundle of odoriferous myrrh which she binds upon her bosom to wear it permanently there, where its perfumes may regale her with perpetual delight. Prof. Stowe's translation gives the true idea more nearly than may be at first supposed—"A cluster of myrrh is my beloved to me—a bouquet in my bosom." This rendering varies from the precise thought of the passage only in this, that the bouquet is worn mainly for its beauty; this bundle of myrrh was placed there for its fragrance—admirably representing the precious associations that cluster about the name and memorial of Jesus in every Christian's heart. His very name is fragrant with all sweet odors, exhaling the breath of heaven. How beautiful and befitting that we should bind it to our bosom to wear it there by day and by night, that we may inhale its sweet odors and refresh our souls with its quickening power!

*Shelomoh resumes.*

15. Lo, thou art fair, my love; lo, thou art *fair:* thine eyes are doves.

So the original gives the last clause—thine eyes are to me doves—gentle, affectionate, winning.

*Shulamith responds in the same strain.*

16. Lo, thou too art fair, my beloved; yea, thou art lovely. Our couch is the green turf. 17. The beams of our house are these overhanging cedars, its rafters these branches of cypress.

They are abroad in the open field—a deeply shaded grove their house and home. Dr. Withington has not unaptly said:—"When an Almighty Savior becomes the Bridegroom, heaven, earth, and sea, the stars and the sky, become the marriage chamber and all the works of nature glow with the consummation."——The reader will not fail to notice that the love portrayed in this song between the two parties is mutual and the expression of it is promptly responsive, each vying with the other in terms of endearment and in assurances of affection. So the Lord through Jeremiah (2: 2, 3) said of Israel: "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness. Israel was holiness unto the Lord."

## CHAPTER II.

RECIPROCAL and mutual expressions of love fill out this chapter

*Shulamith continues:*

1. I am only the rose of Sharon, the humble lily of the vale.

It should be noted that the bride compares herself to things lowly, not lofty; expressing a sense of modesty, not of pride.

*Shelomoh responds:*

2. As the lily among the thorns, so is my love among the daughters.

That is, Though thou be the humble lily of the vale, yet thou art to me the lily as compared with the thorns, the only beautiful and lovely object on earth. All else is vile and repulsive.

Quick as thought *Shulamith* returns the compliment:

3. As the apple among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the sons. Under his shade have I delighted to sit, and his fruit has been sweet to my taste. 4. He brought me into his house of wine, his banner over me was love. 5. Sustain me with grape-cakes; refresh me with apples; for I languish with love. 6. His left hand is under my head; his right enfolds me.

So much manifested love as v. 4 expresses affects the bride most deeply. Overpowered by her emotions, she sinks down into sleep. Here the bridegroom, tenderly caring for her comfort, interposes:—

*Shelomoh.*

7. I charge you, ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and the gazelles of the field, that ye rouse not nor wake my love, till she please.

This verse, which occurs twice elsewhere in this Song (viz., in 3: 5 and 8: 4), should be in every case, "until *she* please;" not as our English version has it, "Until *he* please"—the gender in the Hebrew being uniform and decisive, showing that the party *spoken of* is the bride and not the bridegroom; the speaker, therefore, is the bridegroom and not the bride.

*Shulamith* now speaks:

8. The voice of my beloved:—'t is he; he comes—leaping o'er the mountains; bounding o'er the hills. 9. My love is like the antelope or the young fawn;—lo, there he

stands beyond the wall, looking through the window, glancing his eye through the lattice.

Some writers assume that the bride is here supposed to be asleep and *dreaming*, the scenes narrated in vs. 8–17 and 3: 1–4 being those of her dreams. I see no great objection to this assumption, and on the other hand I see no special necessity for it. Sudden transitions of thought are entirely admissible in such poetry without the supposition of dreams. All we need as fair interpreters is the hypothesis of a sudden transition from one poetic scene to another.——At this point the bride has awakened, and now there breaks upon her ear the voice of her beloved, coming with the speed of the antelope over mountains and hills to meet her. The scene is inspiring; her loving heart invests it with the richest costume of oriental poetry. He looks through her chamber window and calls her forth to enjoy with him the loveliness of spring, in the words that follow:—

10. My beloved spake and said to me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. 11. For lo, the winter is past; the rains are over and gone; 12. The flowers appear on the earth: the time of song has come; the voice of the turtle-dove is heard in our land: 13. The fig-tree spices her green figs; the blossoming vines exhale their fragrance: arise and come, my love; my fair one, come away. 14. My dove is in the clefts of the rock, in the coverts of the precipices. Show me thy face; let me hear thy voice; for thy voice is music and thy face is beauty.

All this is true to nature. Hearts that really love delight to make the loved one happy. The feeling is that all life is dull and all pleasure tasteless unless enjoyed as well by the object of our tender affection. But every earthly good becomes ten-fold more a joy to us when we may share it with those we love. These principles of our social nature are beautifully set forth in this song, and with them yet another, viz.: that the beauties and charms with which God has enriched the realm of nature—the music of birds, the fragrance and beauty of flowers, the countless charms of spring after the winter is over and gone—have a wonderful sympathy with the pure love which the same Great Father has provided for in the social nature of the sexes in their mutual relation to each other.——The thing to be specially noted here is that the inspired author of this song seizes upon this beautiful exemplification of wedded love to illustrate the deep and pure affection which exists in such richness and power between God and his redeemed people. God would assure us of the strength and tenderness of this love on his part, and would call forth responsive love on our part in return. Blessed are they whose hearts do respond with overflowing soul!——In v. 14 the bridegroom seems to assume

that his bride is reserved, distant, half-hidden from his view, and he would fain call her forth from her hiding place.——In the remaining verses of this chapter the bride speaks in her own person, thus:

*Shulamith.*

15. Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that are spoiling the vines, for our vines are now in blossom.

That is, Think not of me as distant and heartless. I am by your side, in full sympathy with you in all that appertains to our common life and mutual comfort, watching against our common enemies, ready for any service that may minister to our mutual welfare. And not content with this, her loving heart breathes forth its loyalty, saying:

16. My beloved is mine, and I am his; he is feeding his flock among the lilies. 17. When the day breathes cool and the shadows grow long, then return thou, my love, and be like the gazelle or the fawn, bounding over the craggy hills.

He spends the day with his flocks in the cares of shepherd life. Her yearning heart awaits his return at nightfall, and thinks of him as gracefully overleaping the hills in the ardor of his warm love to greet her in their rural happy home. So the Christian heart delights to meet and commune with Jesus when the day and its labors are over and darkness shuts off the outer world and invites us to soul-communion with those we love.

## CHAPTER III.

The chapter opens with a scene in the city (vs. 1–5) and closes with another in which the king is seen coming up from the land of the South where he has wedded this rural bride (vs. 6–11).

*Shulamith speaks.*

1. On my bed in the night I sought him whom my soul loveth; I sought him, but I found him not. 2. Let me rise now and go about the city; in the streets and in the broad ways let me seek him whom my soul loveth. I sought him, but I found him not. 3. The watchmen who patrol the city found me:—Have you seen him whom my soul loveth? 4. Scarce had I passed them when I found him whom my soul loveth; I took hold of him and would not let

him go until I had brought him to my mother's house—to the chamber of her who bare me.

Literally understood, the scenes described here are very improbable, scarcely supposable. A young bride roaming the streets of Jerusalem by night in the strange pursuit of her missing husband, and at length arresting him, much as an officer of justice arrests a culprit; such a scene, whether in oriental or occidental life, would be thought extravagant and romantic. Moreover, the localities seem incongruous, for this scene is in Jerusalem, but her mother's house is in some remote southern land. The literal sense labors.——But to the Christian consciousness every feature is a matter of experience. God sometimes hides his face and withdraws all sense of his presence. Some cherished sin, some remissness in spiritual watchfulness and prayer, is the cause: this painful sense of an absent God and of his expressed displeasure, is the result. The records of Christian experience witness, alas, but too often, to facts of which the scene here put before us is a vivid illustration.——Wearied with this search through the streets of the city by night, and at length relieved from her painful solicitudes and heart-agonies, she falls asleep, and

*Shelomoh speaks:*

5. I charge you, ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and by the gazelles of the field, that ye rouse not nor wake my love till she please.

And now a sudden transition places before us a new scene. *Shulamith* seems to be the speaker.

6. Who is this that comes up from the wilderness of the south, like columns of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the spices of the caravans? 7. Behold the couch of Shelomoh! Around it are sixty valiant men of the heroes of Israel; 8. All of them girt with the sword, trained for war, each with his sword upon his thigh because of dangers by night. 9. A royal palanquin has king Shelomoh prepared for himself of wood from Lebanon. 10. Its pillars he made of silver; its seat of gold; its cushions of purple; the midst of it paved with love by the daughters of Jerusalem. 11. Go forth, ye daughters of Zion, behold king Shelomoh wearing the bridal wreath with which his [rural] mother crowned him in the day of his nuptials—in the day of the joy of his heart.

The closing verse seems to take us back to the wedding scene, as the verses that precede give the bridal tour; the palanquin, the royal guard, and the magnificent procession from the rural home of the young bride to the royal city of Zion.

## CHAPTER IV.

In vs. 1–15 the king is the speaker, setting forth the beauties and charms of his royal bride. V. 16 is her response.——In the current strain of the song the respective parties extol each other's charms as if in a pleasing rivalry, laboring each to outdo the other in these mutual testimonies to their high appreciation of each other. The reader will be struck with the oriental and pastoral cast of the imagery under which these points of personal beauty are set before us. Shepherd life furnishes a large share of the illustrations. The standard of what is deemed fair and beautiful is that of the children of the East in those early ages of our race.

*Shelomoh.*

1. Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thine eyes seen through thy vail are doves; thy hair is like a flock of goats which seem to hang from the crags of Mt. Gilead. 2. Thy teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes as they come up from the washing, each with twin lambs and no barren one among them.

Here, as in 1: 15, I give the sense of the Hebrew precisely: "Thine eyes *are* doves;" not, Thou hast eyes *like* a dove. The poetic conception is full and strong. The dove is the embodiment of whatever is tender, delicate, loving: so her eyes were best described by the one word, *doves*.——A charming sight to the shepherd was his flock of goats, seeming to hang suspended from the beetling crags of Mt. Gilead; such was the hair of the bride. So, too, the perfectly pastoral scene of a flock of ewes, fresh from their washing, with each her twins attending like a setting of jewels; such were her teeth. Utility is one element of beauty. A barren ewe would be a deformity and a grief—a thing out of order and in bad taste.

3. Thy lips are a scarlet thread; thy mouth most beautiful; thy cheeks from behind thy vail are as a slice of the pomegranate. 4. Like the tower of David, built for an arsenal, a thousand bucklers suspended from it, all shields of the heroes—such is thy neck.

We might be tempted to call this extravagant, save as we remember that under the enchantment of impassioned love nothing seems extravagant.

5. Thy two breasts are as two young fawns, twins of the beautiful roe, feeding among the lilies.

The reader will bear in mind that in oriental usage the bosom was uncovered equally with the neck, and hence it was no offense against modesty and delicacy to speak of it as we would speak of the cheeks or of the eyes. The vail covered the bosom equally with the face—no more.

6. When the day blows cool and the shadows grow long, I will haste to this mountain of myrrh, this hill of frankincense.

The approach of evening calls the shepherd-king home to the bride he loves—here thought of as a mountain crowned from base to summit with the richest spices of the East.

7. Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot on thee. 8. Come thou with me from Lebanon, my spouse; yea, from Lebanon come thou with me and look forth from the summit of Amanah, from the height of Shenir and Hermon, from the lairs of the lions, and from the mountains of leopards.

Some have inferred from this allusion to Lebanon that Solomon had a country seat there and laid this scene amid those surroundings. Perhaps so; and yet we may connect this allusion by the laws of mental association with his thought of his bride (v. 6) as herself a mountain of myrrh, a hill of frankincense. Let us think of all this as poetry and love, the happy pair regaling themselves amid the charms of nature, each enjoying with double relish the jointly shared happiness of looking forth from some lofty mountain peak upon the glory of the valleys below. At least such is the poetic conception.

9. Thou hast stolen my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast stolen my heart with one glance of thine eye, with one chain of thy neck. 10. How ravishing thy love, my sister, my spouse; how much better than wine; and the fragrance of thy ointments above all the spices. 11. Thy lips, O my spouse, distill honey; honey and milk flow from thy tongue; thy robes breathe the odors of Lebanon. 12. A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring inclosed, a fountain sealed.

A garden whose fruits and even its odors were sacred for its proprietor alone; a fountain sealed, yielding its waters to him only—such was his beloved spouse, chaste and true to her vows—to the covenant of her God. So the living church, so every true Christian, yields the heart's love to Christ supremely, to Christ alone.——Naturally the song at this point expatiates afresh upon the charms of such wedded love. The main source of the imagery

is an oriental fruit and flower garden, filled with the fragrant spice-bearing plants of the East.

13. Thy plants are a paradise [park] of pomegranates with all most precious fruits, cypress with spikenard; 14. Spikenard and crocus, sweet cane and cinnamon, with all the trees of Lebanon; myrrh and aloes, with the richest spices. 15. A fount of the gardens art thou, a well-spring of living waters and streams from Lebanon.

A living fountain bursting forth at the foot of the garden; a well-spring of cold flowing waters like those from the sides of Lebanon, fill out the ideal of this paradise of spicery and beauty which means simply the charms of person and of character seen by the king in his bride.——Here let us for a moment turn our thought to the proper significance of this representation. *God delights in the true piety of his redeemed and sanctified people.* In the case of the father rejoicing over his prodigal son, now alive from the dead, penitent too, trustful and grateful, we may see the reason why. The "joy set before him for which Jesus endured the cross," he finds in the deep warm gratitude, the ardent responsive love, the abiding trust, the honest and loving service of those who give him their very hearts. When "beholding as in a glass the glory of their Lord, they are changed into the same image," why should not he love the resulting spirit and character? I know it is sad to our heart [how much more to his?] to think that this image of Christ, reproduced in his people, has such imperfections. O, how we wish it were pure as the pattern itself, worthy of the love which has begotten it all! But God employs himself in agencies of discipline and agencies of his Spirit to make us yet the more "partakers of his holiness" to "sprinkle us with clean water that we may be clean" from all moral filthiness. The final result will be to his overflowing joy. Let us trust his wise management and thank him for his faithfulness. Let it be a perpetual inspiration toward more holiness that our Savior finds an object of complacent regard in every grateful emotion of our souls toward him; in every thought and deed of love and service; in all our homage, in all our sympathy, in all our trust.——At this point and in this view, the prayer of the bride in the closing verse is beautifully significant.

*Shulamith.*

16. Wake, O north wind; come, O south; breathe upon my garden that its spices may exhale their fragrance. Let my beloved come into his garden and eat his luscious fruits.

As the breezes draw forth and waft along the sweet odors of a garden of spices, so God's Spirit stirs the emotions of love, calls forth the aspirations of faith, of prayer, of gratitude—indeed, of all holy affections and purposes. This Spirit is the "wind that bloweth where

it listeth," and does its work unseen to the eye of sense but not unfelt in the chambers of the Christian heart. How fitting that when Jesus intimates how much he loves the beauty of holiness in his people and the fragrance of pure hearts, grateful, loving, and trustful, we should lift up our prayer as in the verse before us—"Wake, O north wind; come, O south wind; breathe upon my garden that its spices may exhale their odors; and then let my beloved come into his garden." O might there only be in it some fruits of penitence and love and self-sacrificing devotion in which he could find delight!

## CHAPTER V.

*Shelomoh responds.*

1. I come into my garden, my sister, my spouse; I gather my myrrh with my spices; I have eaten my honey from the comb; I have drunk my wine with my milk. Now eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink freely, O ye beloved.

In its literal aspect this passage must refer either (1) to the usual marriage feast—the bread and flesh, the honey, wine, and milk provided so plenteously on such occasions; or (2) it must represent under the figure of a feast the connubial joys of the wedded pair.——The former is singularly unsocial and inept—thus: I have eaten all I care for; now, my invited guests, turn in and help yourselves to all you want!——The second alternative is fully in harmony with the strain of the previous context—"A garden inclosed is my spouse, a fountain sealed"—all delights are for her beloved, and for him only. As said in the introduction, the unlimited invitation of friends to this feast is one of the features in this song which seem to forbid its exclusive and ultimate reference to a literal marriage, and demand the figurative or allegorical construction. In this construction the sense is obvious. As Jesus enjoys the communion and fellowship of love with his Zion as an ideal unity, so does he also invite all his people to come individually and participate in the wealth of this blessedness. Who can doubt that all the holy in the universe come into the broad and deep sympathy of love in admiring contemplation of such depths of divine compassion and tenderness for those once lost but at length found? "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." The revelations of the love of God for lost men, made in the gospel scheme, will be the joy and the song, not of saints from earth alone, but of all the holy

beings in the universe. Of this pervasive joy and blessedness our passage may give pre-intimations.

A new scene opens—*Shulamith speak*s.

2. I sleep, but my heart waketh.——The voice of my beloved, knocking, saying, "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled; for my head is wet with dew; my locks with the drops of the night."——3. I have taken off my dress; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I soil them again?——4. My beloved passed his hand through the window; my heart fluttered before him. 5: I rose to open to my beloved; my hand dropped myrrh, yea, my fingers the sweet smelling myrrh upon the handles of the bar. 6. I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned away and was gone! My soul went forth for one word from him: I sought him, but I found him not; I called, but he gave me no answer. 7. The watchmen who patrol the city found me; they smote and wounded me; they tore off my vail—those watchmen of the city walls!——8. Ye daughters of Jerusalem, I adjure you if ye find my beloved that ye tell him I languish for him with love.

The transitions of thought from point to point in this scene are somewhat sudden, yet on the whole the sense is obvious, the sketching is beautiful, and the moral instruction of the highest order.——"I sleep, but my heart waketh"—restive, dissatisfied, under a painful sense of something wrong in this state of moral distance from God. Then how touching the call to open to her beloved! With what patient discomfort, with what long suffering compassion had her Lord sought to restore the disturbed connubial relations; how had he waited for her under the chilling dews of night to open the door and let him in! Then the conflict of emotions in her bosom; on the one hand, the pitiful excuses, the sluggish reluctance to the least effort: but, on the other, the fluttering of the heart, the sense of duty, the yearnings of reviving love! How sad her heart to find that he had turned away and was gone! Some bitter experiences of grief and penitence must be endured before she can have again the joys of his presence.——All this is wonderfully true to Christian experience. Who does not know it?

Next we have the *daughters of Jerusalem* saying,—

9. What is thy beloved more than any beloved, thou fairest of women; what is thy beloved more than any beloved that thou shouldest adjure us so?

The same envious and sinister feeling appears here in the damsels of Jerusalem that we have seen before and shall meet again.

Their question however gives occasion to the bride to answer in good faith and recount the virtues, the beauties, and the graces of her beloved.

*Shulamith.*

10. My beloved is white and ruddy, the chief among ten thousand. 11. His head is the purest gold, his locks are bushy, black as a raven. 12. His eyes are as doves by the rivers of water, bathed in milk, reposing in full sockets; 13. His cheeks are beds of spices, aromatic mounds; his lips are lilies, exhaling sweet odors. 14. His hands are pillars of gold set with gems of Tarshish; his body is as wrought ivory, jeweled with sapphires. 15. His legs are like marble columns, set on bases of pure gold; his form is as Lebanon, grand as its cedars; 16. His mouth is most sweet; yea, he is altogether lovely. Such is my beloved—such is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.

Carrying out the ideas of that age as to personal beauty and splendor, this portrait is exquisite and gives us a transcendent model of a prince. Translating it from the sensual and earthly to the spiritual, it witnesseth most admirably to the beauties and glories of our Divine Redeemer.——The reader will find it refreshing to compare this description with that given (Rev. 1: 12–16) of the glorified Jesus as he appeared to the seer of Patmos. This is cast after the ideas of royal splendor which prevailed in the age of Solomon. That shown in Patmos is, however, by far the more majestic and sublime.

## CHAPTER VI.

*Daughters of Jerusalem.*

1. Whither has thy beloved gone, thou fairest of women; whither has thy beloved turned away? Let us seek him with thee.

*Shulamith* replies:

2. My beloved has gone down to his garden, even to his beds of spices, to regale himself in the garden, and to gather lilies. 3. I am for my beloved, and my beloved is for me. He regales himself among the lilies.

It is remarkable how naturally the assurances of mutual devotion between her Lord and herself blend here with the love of nature—the beauties of flowers and the odors of sweet spices. Perhaps this may be a foreshadowing of the joys of the paradise above. If in this world, so fearfully cursed with sin, God has yet lavished such a wealth of beauty and loveliness, what may we not anticipate in that pure heaven where no sin exists to demand an expression of God's displeasure; where there is nothing to impose limitations upon the exuberant fulness of God's love of the beautiful, or upon his delight in the varied and endlessly diversified bliss of his obedient children!

*Shelomoh* resumes:

4. Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, magnificent as a bannered host. 5. Turn away thine eyes from me, for indeed they overpower me. Thy hair is as a flock of goats which seem to hang from the crags of Mt. Gilead. 6. Thy teeth are as a flock of ewes which come up from the washing, every one with twin lambs and no one barren. 7. As a slice of the pomegranate are thy cheeks, seen through thy vail. 8. There are three score queens and four score concubines and virgins without number. 9. But this *one* is my dove, my undefiled, *the* one of her mother, most dear to her that bare her. The daughters saw and blessed her; the queens and concubines praised her.

Tirzah (v. 4) appears in the history (1 Kings 15: 21, 33) as the residence of King Baasha.——The recurrence of the same expressions is a characteristic feature of this song. Compare 4: 1–3 with vs. 5–7 in this passage.——The allusion to queens and concubines must naturally refer to those of Solomon himself—else how should they be *queens* at all? They are introduced here apparently to show that this one is ranked and beloved far before them all. The allusion avails to rule out the theory that the song contemplates a case of monogamy, and that it should be taken in its literal sense only, being designed to set forth the joys of living with one wife in contrast with the ills of living with many.

At this point of the scene *Shelomoh* catches a view of his bride and exclaims:

10. Who is this that shines forth as the morning, fair as the moon, pure as the sun, and magnificent as a bannered host?

To which *Shulamith* answers, explaining why she is there.

11. I came down to my nut-garden to see the green plants of the vale—to see if the vines were in blossom and the

pomegranates in the flower. 12. Ere I was aware my soul was as the war-chariot of my noble people.

The charm of this passage is the humble modesty of her answer, considered as following such expressions of admiration, or may we not say, of exuberant panegyric as appear in v. 10. O if the children of God were always in the spirit of such modest self-appreciation, would it not be beautiful? I was only looking into our garden to care for its welfare and to enjoy the opening flowers of spring as the smiles of my Father's love. But those words of thine, so significant of thy love to me—how did they lift my soul into rapture and seem to bear me away with overpowering emotions!

*Shelomoh* resumes:

13. Return, return, O Shulamith; return, return, and let us look upon thee.

To which *Shulamith* responds:

Why should ye look upon Shulamith as upon a dance of double bands?

I regard this passage as somewhat obscure, and can not be absolutely certain that I have the true meaning. My translation gives what seems to be the legitimate sense of the original, and withal it is in harmony with the spirit of the context. We see the same exquisite modesty which shone so finely in v. 11. Why should you scan my personal beauty so sharply, looking upon me much as you might upon a troop of dancing girls in double rows?

## CHAPTER VII.

Shelomoh extols the beauty of form and of person which he sees in his bride (vs. 1–9), to which the bride replies (vs.10–13). The dividing line seems to be more precisely in the midst of v. 9.

1. How fair are thy sandaled feet, thou chieftain's daughter! Thy hips are round like turned work skillfully wrought; 2. Thy front as a round goblet never lacking mixed wine; thy full form as a sheaf of wheat encircled with lilies; 3. Thy two breasts like two fawns, twins of the roe; 4. Thy neck like an ivory tower; thine eyes as pools of Heshbon at the gate of Bath-rabbim; thy nose like the tower of Lebanon which looks out upon Damascus. 5. Thy

head surmounting thy person is as the top of Carmel; its locks are as purple hangings in which a king's heart might be fast bound. 6. How fair art thou and how sweet, O Love, in thy charms! 7. Thy stature is like the palm-tree; thy breasts as grape-clusters. 8. I said, I will go to this palm-tree and take hold of its pendant boughs—thy bosom as the grape-cluster; thy fragrance as the apple; 9. Thy mouth like sweet wine.

*Shulamith interposes.*

9. Let this wine go (rightly) for my beloved, gliding through the lips of the sleeping ones. 10. I am for my beloved, and his affection is upon me. 11. Come, my beloved, let us go forth to the fields; let us abide in the villages. 12. Let us be up betimes to the vineyards; let us see if the vines are in blossom, if the young grapes have set, if the pomegranates have budded. There will I assure thee of my love. 13. The love-apples diffuse their fragrance; at our doors are all most precious fruits, new and old, which I have treasured for thee, my beloved.

It is scarcely necessary to reiterate that these conceptions and illustrations of personal beauty and form are altogether oriental in their cast, and can not therefore be judged of in all respects by the standard of our age and country. This is wedded love, thoroughly mutual and promptly responsive, such as takes hold of the deepest sensibilities of our being. Here, too, as throughout this exquisite poem, it manifests the richest sympathy for rural life and for the thousand beauties and charms with which God has invested the face of this fair world.——Need it surprise us that God should seize upon this strong and rich affection of human souls to illustrate the love he bears to his people and the responsive love which his Spirit begets in their hearts to himself in return? Where else can a more vivid and perfect illustration of this spiritual love be found?

## CHAPTER VIII.

*Shulamith continues.*

1. Would that thou wert as my own brother who had nursed the same mother; then might I find thee abroad and kiss thee, and men would not despise me for it. 2. I might lead thee and bring thee to the house of my mother,

who should instruct me, and I might give thee spiced wine to drink from the fresh juice of my pomegranates. 3. His left hand should be under my head; his right should embrace me.

The warm love of her heart prompts her to the caresses of affection which in the view of the people would be admissible as between brother and sister. Hence the wish that her relation to him was of this sort.——At this point she is supposed to fall asleep, perhaps overcome by her emotions, and *Shelomoh* interposes—

4. I charge you, ye daughters of Jerusalem, that ye rouse not nor wake my love till she please.

*Other parties speak.*

5. Who is this that comes up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?

By a sudden transition, Shelomoh reverts to the place of his bride's birth, which seems also to have been the place where he first made her acquaintance and solicited the love of her heart.

*Shelomoh.*

Under that apple tree did I first solicit thy love, even there where thy mother bare thee, where thou wast born.

By the same coincidence, Israel was born as a nation and became the royal bride of Jehovah by special covenant, both at the same place and at the same time, the Exodus and Sinai marking this location and chronicling this time. (See Ex. 19 and Jer. 2: 2, 3.)——This allusion brings out Shulamith, expressing the ardor and strength of her love and praying that she may be bound to her Divine Husband in bonds that can never be broken.

*Shulamith.*

6. Let me be as a signet upon thy heart, yea, as a signet upon thine arm, for love is strong as death; jealousy is relentless as the grave; its coals are those of burning fire. 7. Many waters can not quench love, nor rivers drown it. If one should give all the wealth of his house for love, men would utterly despise it.

In the next two verses we have the same brothers of the bride who appear in chap. 1: 6—there putting her to constant service in the fields; here, inappreciative and distrustful.——Some critics assume in these verses a younger sister of the bride and not the bride herself; but the assumption seems to me to lack support. The passage however is obscure, perhaps a designed enigma.

*First brother.*

8. We have a little sister and she hath no breasts: what shall we do for our sister when one shall speak for her?

*Second brother.*

9. If she were a wall, we would build on it a silver palace: if she were a door, we would overlay it with boards of cedar.

The sense of this seems to be—If she were chaste and reserved, *walling off* all improper approaches, we might build up a noble character, comparable to a palace of silver; but if she were a *door*, too easily approachable, we must needs barricade and strengthen it with boards of cedar. In this construction, the thing most objectionable in their spirit is their lack of confidence in their sister, and their thinking of her as still a mere child.——To this she indignantly replies, in their own sort of figure and phrase:

*Shulamith.*

10. I am a wall and my breasts are as towers; so was I in his eyes as one who finds favor.

I am a wall, not a door; there is no occasion for your suspicious insinuations. I enjoy my royal husband's love.——Changing the subject suddenly, as a modest girl would, she continues—

11. King Shelomoh had a vineyard in Baal Hamon: he let it out to vine-dressers. They gave for its fruits a thousand pieces of silver. 12. My vineyard is under my own care. *The* thousand pieces of silver are for thee, O Shelomoh, and two hundred for the vine-dressers.

So far as appears in these brief and therefore obscure statements, Solomon's contract brought him in one thousand shekels annually [say, five hundred dollars], but made no stipulation as to the pay of the vine-dressers, and gives no hint whether they squandered the rest or put it in their pockets. The bride's proposal is to take care of her vineyard herself; to give her royal husband one thousand shekels, and to make a fair provision for her laborers besides. Every thing here is definite and apparently both generous to her lord and just to her workmen. This is an improvement on his system.

This is one of the fruits of true love in domestic life. O, might it have its full development in all those works of faith and labors of love in which Jesus permits his people to be laborers together with himself!

*Shelomoh* resumes:

13. O thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions are bending to hear thy voice; let me hear it also.

One who takes so much interest in gardens, both for the labor and the care of them and for their beauties and fragrance, might well be designated as "Thou that dwelleth in the gardens." The bride should take this as a compliment.——She seems to have been a general favorite. The king's associates and friends find it a pleasure to hear her voice. Therefore the king says: Let me also hear its sweet tones—its utterances of fidelity, of sympathy in our work, of constancy in love. To which Shulamith makes the closing reply:—

14. O haste, my love, and be like the gazelle or the young roe over the mountains of spices.

O come to dwell forever with me—thy service my only care; thy presence my only and perpetual joy!

Thus closes this exquisite Song, of which one can not easily say whether most to admire its poetic beauty, its painting of wedded love in rural life, or its transcendent presentation of the love which Jesus bears to his people, and which they should, may, and sometimes do bear to him. The latter, which I take to be the ultimate thought—the real significance of the poem—is a theme of exhaustless interest—*the* theme which wakens the strongest and purest emotions ever known to the Christian heart in this life—the theme which is destined to swell the song of the redeemed in their eternal home of purity and bliss.

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